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Rodale's

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JULY 1997 (DISPLAY UNTIL JULY 31)

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OUT OF AIR

Now What? p. 75

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Foolproof Buoyancy Test

NARCED NO MORE

How to Stay
Safe and Sane

COZUMEL RATINGS

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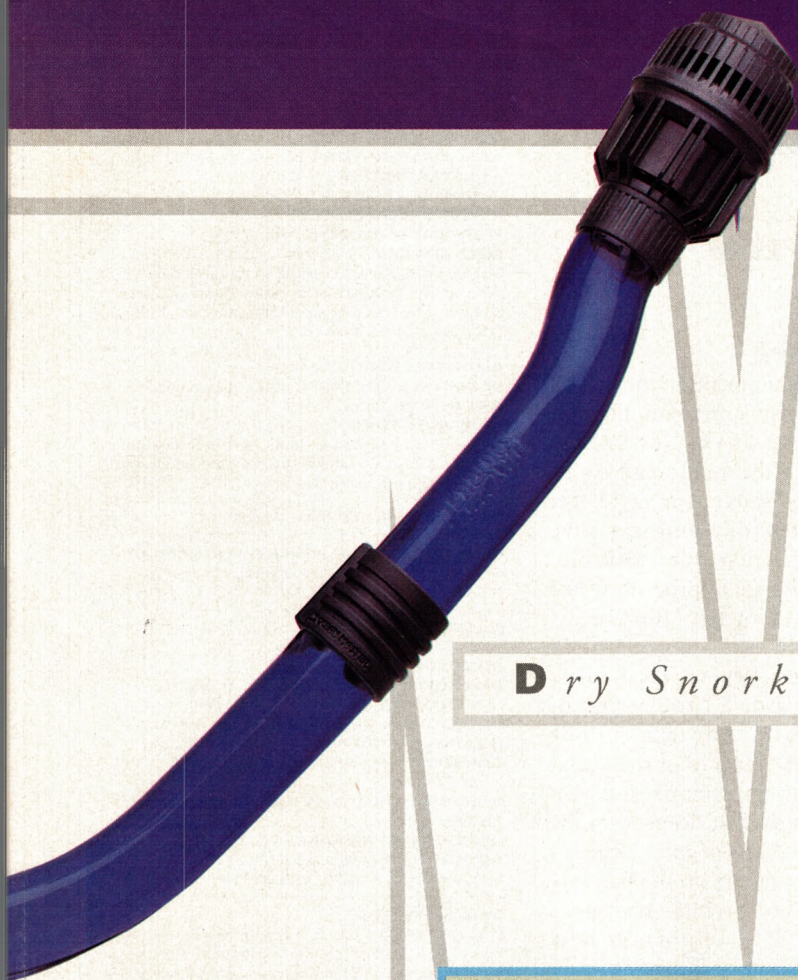
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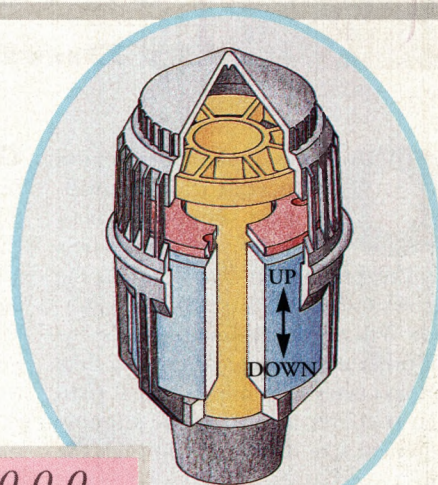
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BEHIND THE LINES

Is Mail Order For You?

By David Taylor

One of the more vexing topics for dive equipment shoppers is mail order. Are the prices truly cheaper than in dive stores? Is the gear reliable? Will warranties be honored? Will my local dive store service mail-order equipment? And at no time are these questions more critical than when it comes to buying life-support equipment like regulators through the mail.

Although mail-order equipment is a controversial topic in the dive industry, the fact is: divers are buying it. And in the case of regulators, they're doing so without objective data on the performance and safety of equipment they're entrusting their lives to.

At RSD, we believe it is our obligation to test *all* the gear that divers are using, and to report on it honestly and accurately. That's why in this issue we continue our series of articles on budget regulators by looking at five private-label brands available through mail order. We ordered these regs over the phone, just as any consumer would. Then our ScubaLab test team put them through the same breathing machine and ocean tests as in previous regulator evaluations. You can read the results beginning on page 67.

During our research for this important article, we discovered that some of these brands were also available in dive stores. This wider, more mainstream distribution is another reason why it is imperative that RSD provide objective test data on these pieces of life-support equipment. As our report makes clear, where you buy your regulator can be as important as which one you buy.

Out of Air?

Better, prettier equipment is one reason diving and snorkeling are more popular than golf these days, but so are advancements in technique and training. The required safety stop at 15 feet for three minutes following any dive below 60 feet is just one example. Another is the change in procedures for the out-of-air emergency. Jon Hardy, one of diving's most experienced instructor-trainers, reports on the new paradigm in his article "You're Out of Air—Now What?" Advances in our understanding of "rapture of the deep" (hint: it ain't so rapturous and you don't have to go all that deep) form the basis of John Francis's report on the bad boy of diving—nitrogen. The important new safety information in these two articles make them must-reads.

Finally, we welcome a new environmental partner to our pages—REEF, the Reef Environmental Education Foundation—who beginning with this issue will author a series of

marine life ID quizzes for RSD. You'll need the training if you participate in this July's Great American Fish Count, a nationwide event co-sponsored by REEF, the American Oceans Campaign, NOAA and the Marine Conservation Network. The Fish Count is a chance for you to use your diving skills to add important knowledge about three of America's coastal environments—Florida, Texas and California.

For dates and contact info, turn to "International Year of the Reef," page 14. And if you're diving in the Jacksonville, Fla., area the first two weeks of July, let's count some fish together.

We ordered five private-label regulators over the phone, just as any consumer would. Then we put them to the test.

Rodale's SCUBA DIVING

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On the Cover: Norbert Wu photographed Meredith Eder in the Solomon Islands. Equipment courtesy of Oceanic Products.

The digital manipulation of this photograph consisted of feathering the image to white.



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*Mike Harber,
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Letters

Bruuup! A Seasickness Forum

Regarding Dr. Shelanski's article on seasickness ("The Diver's Scourge," April '97), I'd like to suggest another successful medication: Emetrol, available over the counter. It settles the stomach and relieves nausea in most cases, without side effects for divers. For those with a history of nausea, I have them take one teaspoon before boarding the boat and sip from the bottle as needed. There are more details about this topic at my web site—www.ent-consult.com.

MURRAY GROSSAN, M.D.
LOS ANGELES, CALIF.

After reading "The Diver's Scourge," I feel compelled to write. About two years ago, after a long history of seasickness, I quit taking birth control pills, which I had been using for 13 years.

Guess what? My next dive trip, no sickness! I've been on several trips since, including four hours on a whale watching boat in rough seas, with no problems. I realize this isn't a practical solution for all women, but it was a great relief for me to continue my favorite activity without the discomfort and embarrassment of feeding the fishes during surface intervals.

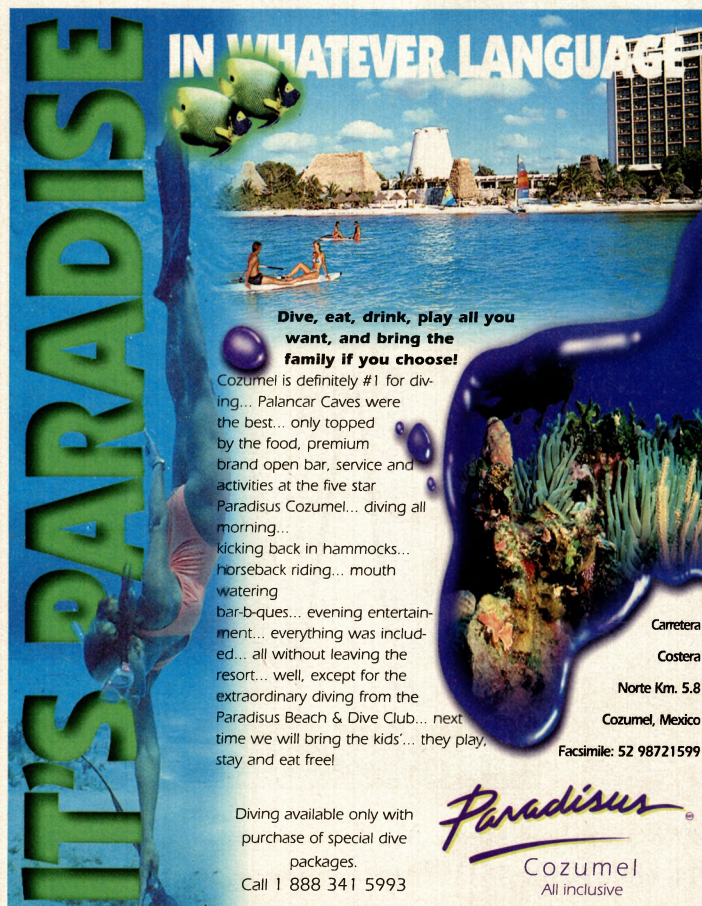
ANNETTE REBEL
OVERLAND PARK, KAN.

I read with interest your article on treatments for seasickness. My wife and I are extremely susceptible to it on live-aboards and were disappointed when Scopolamine patches were withdrawn.

However, my pharmacist has been able to combine Scopolamine in a liquid medium, which is applied to the wrists and rubbed in like perfume an hour before leaving the dock. Also, if nausea is a problem, Compazine, a well-known anti-nausea medication, can also be combined in the same paste-like medium and applied to the wrists, also delivering the medication directly into the bloodstream through the skin. Finally, a medication known to relieve nausea in chemotherapy and radiation therapy patients, Zofran, can be prescribed by your physician. We have also found it to be effective.

ALLAN W. CASS, M.D.
HARLINGEN, TEXAS

"My pharmacist has been able to combine Scopolamine in a liquid medium, which is applied to the wrists."



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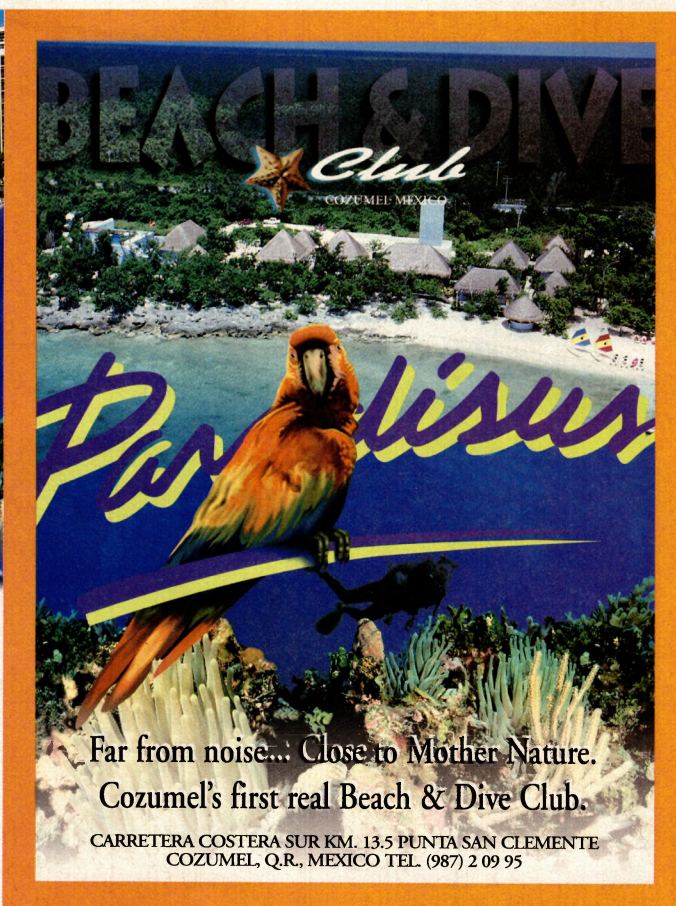
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You're a Genus!

In Charles Ballinger's excellent article on South Africa ("Shark Safari," April '97), I beg to differ with the caption for the gorgeous photo on page 91: "A moonscape of encrusting sponge" it almost assuredly is not. Rather, it is likely a large colony of soft (albeit sponge-like) octocoral of the genus *Simularia*. A forgivable mistake for the amateur marine enthusiast, but I would suggest a minimum desired requirement for such a prestigious and well-liked underwater magazine such as yours is to at least identify the correct phylum.

KENT BACKMAN
MARINE SCIENCE DEPT.
UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII AT HILO

Under Pressure

The article "Equalizing Made Easy" (May '97) contains a factual error. Given relatively constant temperature, you cannot compress air and reduce its pressure at the same time, as stated in the article. The air pressure inside one's ears actually increases as one descends, but only slightly and at a much slower rate of increase

**"I can only
assume the
freight charges on
a swimming pool
from the mail-
order company
must have been
outrageous."**

than the pressure outside the ear. It is this pressure differential between inside and outside the ear that requires us to equalize while descending.

KEVIN CAMPBELL
ROBOTICS CENTER, UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY
LEXINGTON, KY.

Getting a Handle on Weight Ditching

The recent safety tip on weight-belt ditching was great ("Dive Like a Pro," May '97). Regarding the controversy over the left-hand versus right-hand release, we were taught in our NAUI class that left- or right-hand release is not important. Instead, we were instructed to make sure the weight-belt release was an opposite hand action from the BC cummerbund release. By doing so we would minimize risk during the stress of an emergency of accidentally releasing the tank and buoyancy vest.

GARY STEWART
PLEASANTON, CALIF.

Dive Store Disloyalty

Recently two good friends and customers

inquired about prices on new equipment for their upcoming dive vacation. Not having the items in stock, we researched and found the best items at the best prices we could offer. The customers responded by bringing in a mail-order catalog quoting lower prices, before shipping and handling charges had been added—an important point. Why don't divers realize the importance of supporting their local dive retailer? Without us where would they get air for their tanks, repairs and maintenance on their equipment, advice on local diving and the other personal services we offer? Not too long afterward, these customers called to arrange one of our free pool sessions to tune up their skills before vacationing. I can only assume the freight charges on a swimming pool from the mail-order company must have been outrageous.

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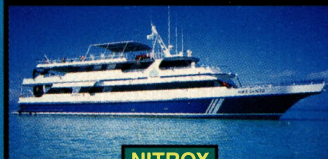
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SEAVIEWS

—Edited by Keith Phillips

► MARINE CONSERVATION

The Hammerheads Are Breathing Easier

Cocos Island, a remote Costa Rican National Park that may hold clues to the ocean's evolutionary past and is famous for its schooling hammerhead sharks, is being considered for international protection as a United Nations World Heritage site.

At the request of Carlos Rodrigues, Costa Rica's director of national parks, a U.N. Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) fact-finding team including Jim Thorsell, head of the World Conservation Union's (IUCN) natural heritage program, and Enrique Lahmann, director of IUCN's Central

American region, dived the 14-square-mile island in March to evaluate the island's ecological and biological significance. A final decision on the listing is expected in December.

To be declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site, officials must deem it to be a unique natural area of global significance. According to Lahmann, "Cocos Island easily meets the criteria of a superb natural phenomenon."

The island is located 300 miles southwest of Costa Rica in the Pacific

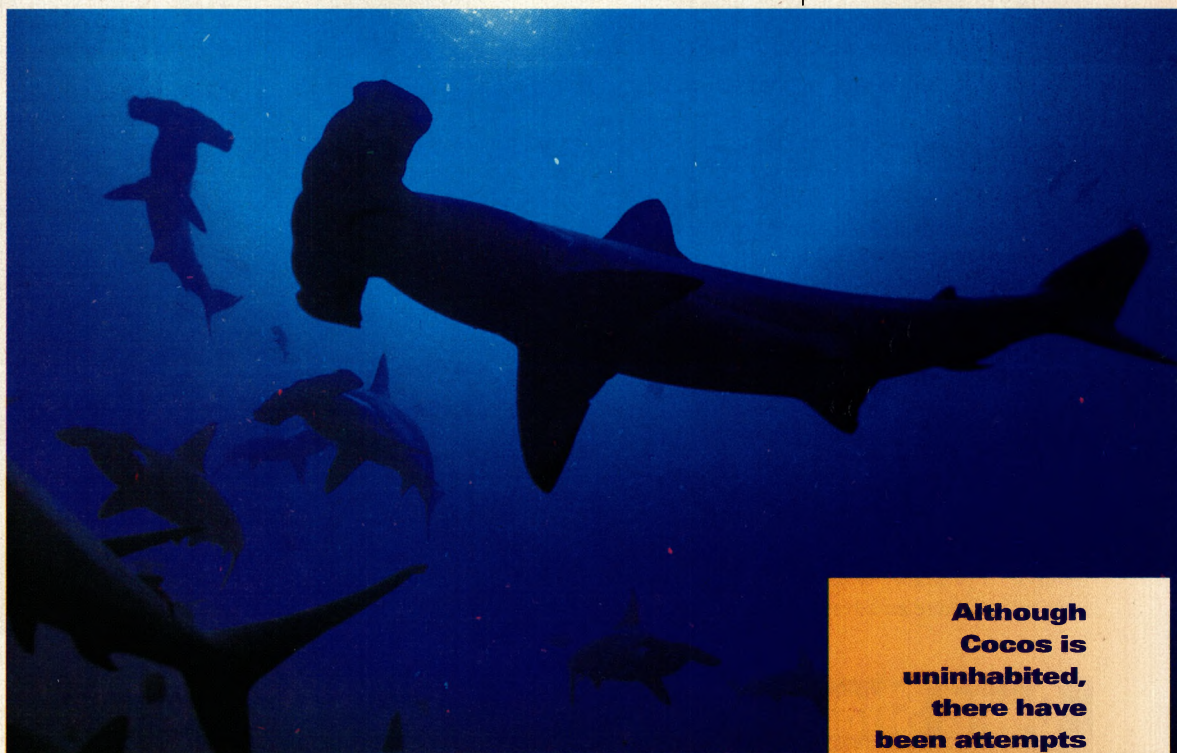
Ocean. Part of the same volcanic mountain range that includes the Galapagos Islands, Cocos grew out of the ocean devoid of life. Its remote location allowed evolution to progress unhindered, and a thriving marine ecosystem developed, with more than 156 species of fish. The island is famous among divers as a pristine live-aboard destination where hammerhead sharks school by the hundreds (see "Costa Rica," *RSD*, June '97).

In sharp contrast to the Galapagos Islands, which are in danger of losing their World Heritage Site status (see "Seaviews: Deadline for Galapagos," *RSD*, April '97), Costa Rica has worked to protect Cocos Island by declaring it a national park, limiting tourism to a handful of live-aboard dive boats and seeking international assistance to preserve the island.

Although Cocos is uninhabited, there have been attempts to poach fish and sharks from the island's waters. Increased patrols by park rangers have put a lid on illegal fishing, but the island still faces topside threats. Domestic animals imported to the island by humans have uprooted vegetation and caused topside erosion that threatens to silt reefs, and there are periodic schemes to develop the island.

"We have done our best to fight these problems, but our resources are limited," says Rodrigues. "If we are included in the UNESCO list of sites, we will have the strength behind us to augment our protective efforts."

—JAY IRELAND AND GEORGIENNE BRADLEY



Although Cocos is uninhabited, there have been attempts to poach fish and sharks from the island's waters.

► SHARK REPELLENT

Back in the Water

When a great white shark grabbed him at the waist in August of 1995, Marco Flagg could only wince and pray.

An engineer who designs underwater tracking units, Flagg was testing a new device off Point Lobos, Calif., when the shark hit. Fortunately for Flagg, most of the teeth were deflected by his scuba tank and the brick-sized tracking device he was wearing. The shark quickly spat him out and Flagg managed to escape with "a few scrapes and stitches."

So what was Flagg's reaction when Jim Morris, the West Coast distributor of the Shark POD electronic repelling device, asked him to test the unit less than six months after the attack? He agreed, of course.

Along with cameraman Yehuda Goldman, the pair headed out to the deep-water pinnacles of the San Pedro channel where upwelling currents are known to attract feisty blue sharks. "I had been back in the water many times since the attack, so going out to the seamount was just fine," says Flagg. "But I was concerned about the validity of the POD and my first encounter with blue sharks."

The Shark POD, or protective ocean device, was developed in Natal, South Africa, by the Natal Shark Board (see "Reef Briefs: Shark PODs," *RSD*, April '96) as a non-lethal way to keep sharks away from swimming beaches. Modified to fit a scuba tank, the diver's unit now for sale in the United States works by emitting an electrical field around the wearer. The field overloads the shark's delicate sensory organs and sends it packing, confused but unharmed.

Flagg said he had his worries when he entered a chum slick with Morris and a half-dozen blue sharks, but each time a blue cruised too close for comfort, they activated the unit and the sharks turned away, says Flagg. "I was impressed with the technology and I wish I was wearing a POD the day the great white came at me," he says. "I probably wouldn't have been attacked if I had it on, but then I would have missed quite an adventure."

—ELLSWORTH BOYD



JIM MORRIS DISPLAYS THE SHARK POD UNIT ON HIS GEAR (ABOVE) AND IN ACTION WITH BLUE SHARKS (BELOW).



JOE SHALMONT

Card Shark

Kenneth Helinski pulls out his plastic accordion-style picture holder like a proud grandmother. Grasping one end, he lets the other end fall to the floor, unfolding in an impressive cascade of paper and plastic. In each pocket is a card representing a dive certification or specialty that Helinski has earned—189 in all. In a distinction that he doesn't seem to find dubious at all, Helinski may be the most prolific scuba student in history.

But why?

"I wanted to get into the *Guinness Book of World Records* for the most scuba certifications," Helinski says. "But they don't want to acknowledge it as a category."

Undeterred, the 36-year-old computer consultant from Buffalo, N.Y., continues amassing certifications. To date, his collection includes cards from 19 agencies, earned in five countries. His specialty certifications include: underwater photographer, equipment specialist, rescue diver, wreck diver, boat diver, night diver, deep diver, kayak diver, dry suit diver, underwater navigator, nitrox diver, cavern diver, cave diver, ice diver, shark diver, dive-master, instructor and instructor trainer. In most cases, he holds certifications from more than one agency. He has five certifications for underwater photography, for instance, and six for wreck diving.

"I like doing the cross-certifications, because agencies teach things a little differently," Helinski says. "It rounds out the topic for me. A PADI wreck-diving class in St. Thomas is different from a NAUI course in Hawaii."

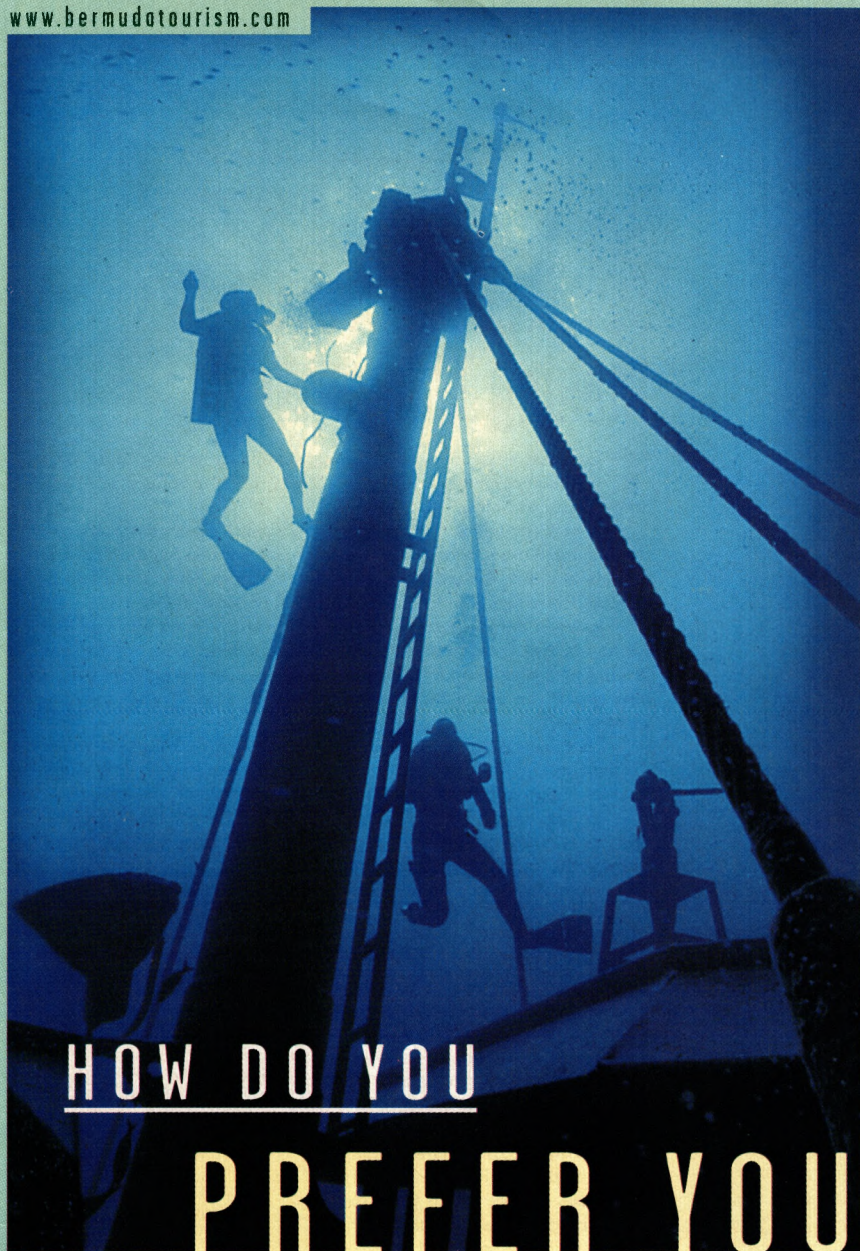
In fact, Helinski says he does very little diving outside the learning environment. When he books a dive vacation, he first requests a list of specialties offered by dive operators and plans his trip around them.

When asked if he can supply a photo of himself, Helinski thinks for a moment and says, "I have a head shot, you know, like for a C-card."

—BUCK BUTLER



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SEAVIEWS

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DAVID TAYLOR

INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE REEF DIVING FESTIVAL, Nov. 1-8

This week-long festival in Bonaire will probably feel more like vacation than conservation, but it features educational seminars conducted by Bonaire Marine Park, the Coral Reef Alliance, the Center for Marine Conservation, Divers Alert Network and Reef Environmental Education Foundation. Topics will range from coral reef ecology to advanced safety training. After seminars on fish and coral surveying, divers will take to the water and put their skills to use studying the health of Bonaire's reefs. Organizers also plan an underwater rodeo during which you can show off your diving skills and eco-awareness.

The festival is open to divers and snorkelers of all skill levels. Packages start at \$859 for seven nights' hotel accommodations, transfers, airfare, five one-tank boat dives and unlimited shore diving. For more information, call Caradonna Caribbean Tours (800-328-2288), Maduro Dive Fanta-Seas (800-327-6709).

REEF

GREAT AMERICAN FISH COUNT, July 1-14

Closer to home, the Great American Fish Count goes nationwide for the first time since 1992 when Channel Islands National Park biologist Gary Davis and 50 volunteers began

their annual survey of fish populations and species diversity.

Now sponsored by the American Oceans Campaign, the Marine Conservation Network and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the fish count has gone coast-to-coast by teaming up with Florida-based Reef Environmental Education Foundation (REEF).

The survey is open to all certified divers, but volunteers will need to attend a two-hour training seminar first. The seminar fee is \$35 and participants will receive an underwater slate, color underwater fish ID cards, waterproof survey sheets, survey report forms, a Great American Fish Count T-shirt and a REEF membership.

Once trained, divers participate by diving as frequently as they like within the two-week period and mailing in their completed survey sheets. After the official count, divers can continue surveying fish each time they dive. The data collected by volunteers is made available to scientists and uploaded onto REEF's web site (<http://www.reef.org>).

Training seminars will be offered in Santa Barbara, Calif., July 3-5; in Marathon, Fla., on July 2; and in Key Largo, Fla., on July 7. For more information, call these coordinators: West Coast—MCN at (510) 838-2544 or Joe Wysocki of Optiquatics at (310) 457-3403. East Coast—Deena Wells of REEF at (305) 451-0312.

—PAUL ASHMORE



► DISABLED DIVERS

Making Things Work

The latest advance in recreational scuba has nothing to do with regulators or gas mixtures. In fact, it's happening as much above water as below.

A new recognition of divers with disabilities is leading some of the biggest names in the industry to create handicapped-accessible resorts and live-aboards. Helping to guide their efforts are handicapped divers like John W. Lawson and Julia Stockton Dorsett.

Lawson didn't even start to scuba dive until long after he lost his hands and arms in a 1987 electrical accident. One day he was driving by a dive shop in Cincinnati and the sign said: "Dive into a new sport" on one side, and the other side said: "What are you waiting for?"

"It caught my attention," Lawson said. He earned his open-water certification in 1994, at age 37, and is now the first upper-extremity double-amputee to become a PADI-certified instructor.

In February 1996, Lawson was diving off the Kona Aggressor, and began talking with the captain about how easy it would be to modify the catamaran to be fully accessible. At the company's invitation, he returned to the boat with Dorsett, a paraplegic working with the Handicapped Scuba Association, to recommend changes.

A few doors were widened, a \$10,000 lift was installed to the upper sun deck, and three rooms modified to be fully accessible. The Aggressor Fleet also modified the design for its Fiji boat, adding a \$35,000 elevator to the second floor and placing seats and adjustable shower heads in all the showers. "It was just the right thing to do," says Matthew Armand, Aggressor Fleet's advertising and marketing director.

Lawson was soon approached by other dive operators and now the househusband and father of three runs a consulting firm to help resorts review their accessibility.

Dorsett, a Pennsylvania resident who edits and publishes the HSA journal, is helping the association develop a five-star rating system of resorts' user-friendliness. She began diving through HSA after a car accident her freshman year in college. By the time she completed her checkout dives in Bonaire, she was hooked—on diving and HSA.

Both Dorsett and Lawson encourage others with disabilities to take up diving—for all the reasons that able-bodied divers do, and then some. "I find scuba to be one of the few sports available to the disabled that enables you to truly feel whole again," says Dorsett.

"When we get under water, we're both in a foreign environment," adds Lawson. "It's very equalizing."

—KAREN SHELANSKI



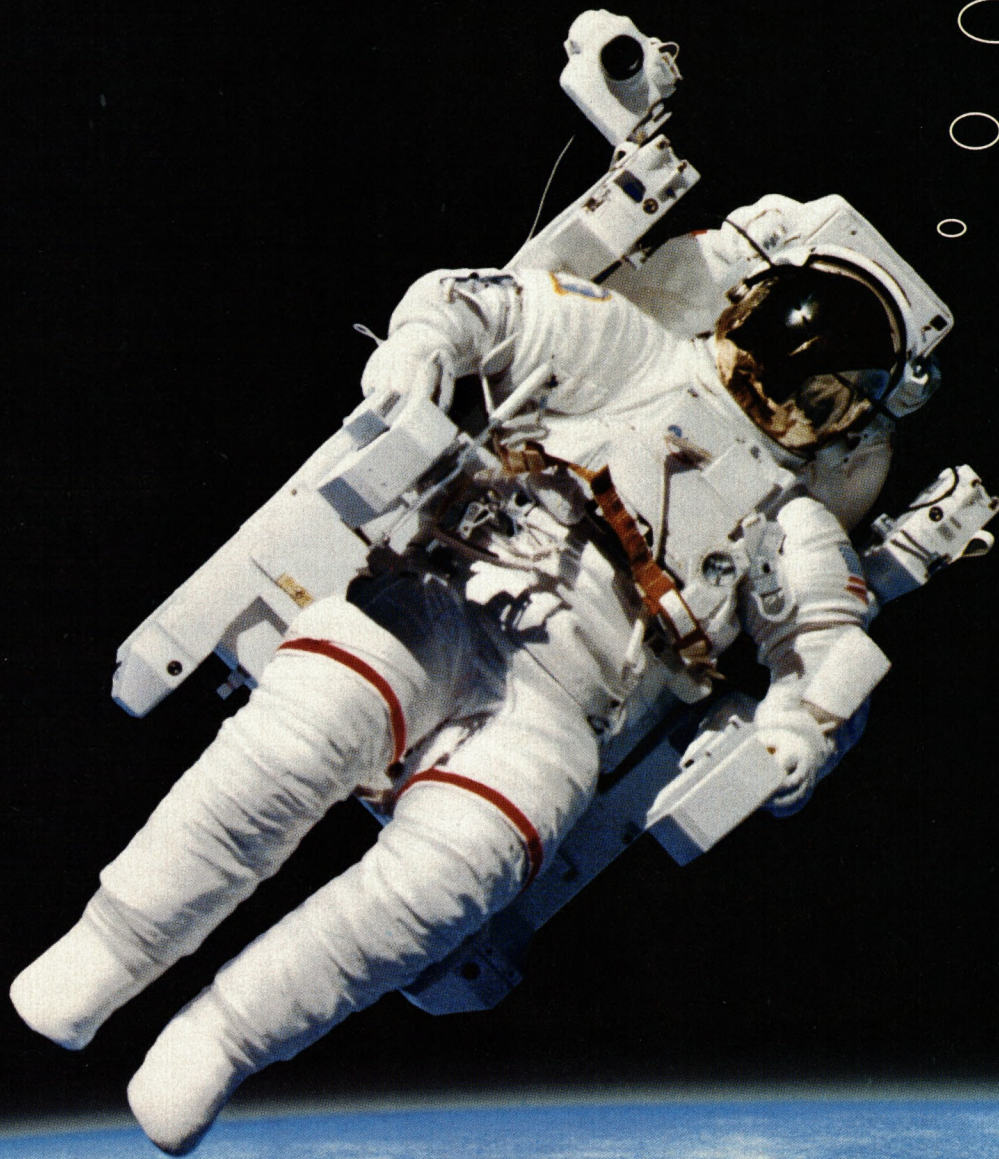
AN EMPLOYEE OF THE AGGRESSOR FLEET DEMONSTRATES THE \$10,000 LIFT THE COMPANY INSTALLED ON THE KONA AGGRESSOR (ABOVE)

For more information on diving with disabilities, contact HSA International at: 1104 El Prado San Clemente, CA 92672 (714) 498-6128 <http://www.ourworld.com-mpuserve.com/homepage/hsahdq> e-mail: hsahdq@compuserve.com

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► LESSONS FOR LIFE

A Question of Responsibility by Jon Hardy



Ed.'s note: This regular column presents the anatomy of a scuba diving accident and the lessons to be learned from it. The incidents described are real. Names of locations and people have been changed or deleted.

The Friends

Several friends have been traveling together and diving for fun at the better Florida springs. All are certified divers with experience, including an underwater instructor. At one spring, with a modest cave where limited penetration is possible, the instructor says that he is going to dive the cave and the others may choose their own dive plans. As it happens, they all decide to join the instructor.

The Dive

Equipped with appropriate cave diving equipment and plan, but not prior training or experience in cave diving, the divers penetrate the cave and descend to nearly 100 feet. At this point, during an instrument check, one of the divers indicates apprehension and his wish to exit. One of the other divers is making a video of the dive and captures this event on tape. The divers swim out of the cave and start their ascent in the clear, open waters of the spring. The ascent appears to be normal, but on reaching the surface, the nervous diver suddenly goes into significant distress with signs of a major diving malady.

The Rescue

Assistance is immediate. The diver is pulled from the water, first aid is administered and he is rushed to a recompression chamber where he is treated with difficulty, but successfully.

The Legal Action

Back in their home state, the victim brings a legal action against the underwater instructor for taking him on this dive and allegedly causing this accident; the victim also claims residual damage from the accident. The fundamental question before the court: Is an underwater instructor responsible for other divers when on a pleasure dive even if there is no compensation or instruction involved? A related key question: Should the instructor have required or forced the diver to make a decompression or safety stop?

The Trial

During the trial, the physician for the defense describes a little-known form of decompression sickness (DCS) that is difficult to treat and resists resolution. This occurs when an arterial gas embolism (AGE) causes the DCS. But the physician cannot state categorically that this is indeed what happened.

Later, as the defense diving expert is being cross-examined by the plaintiff's attorney, the attorney produces a photo taken from the video showing the dive instruments when the return to the surface was begun. The plaintiff's attorney is trying to show, through the opposing expert, that the dive computer indicates the divers have significant nitrogen and should have decompressed. The expert carefully explains that the attorney is reading the dive computer backwards—this is a dive computer where the graphic display disappears as you approach a need for decompression, rather than the more common method where increased nitrogen loading is indicated by a growing display. Suddenly it is clear that there was very little nitrogen loading and no need for a stop of any kind. The trial ends in a defense verdict.

TIMOTHY OKEEFE

Analysis

An embolism occurs while scuba diving when there is a reduction in pressure combined with one of two other possible causes: breath holding, or a medical defect that does not allow complete equalization.

Therefore, to avoid an embolism:

- ✦ Be healthy. Get medical exams, do not smoke and do not dive immediately after being ill.
- ✦ While ascending, go slow, relax, breathe easily and continuously.

Lessons for Life

- ✦ As a diver, you are the only person who can ultimately be responsible for your breathing, health, safety and comfort.
- ✦ Open-water divers should *not* penetrate caves—even when properly equipped and accompanied by experienced divers *unless they are under the active supervision of an instructor as part of a formal training course.*
- ✦ Do not enter a diving situation that is beyond your skills or that you are not comfortable with, even if accompanied by highly trained buddies.



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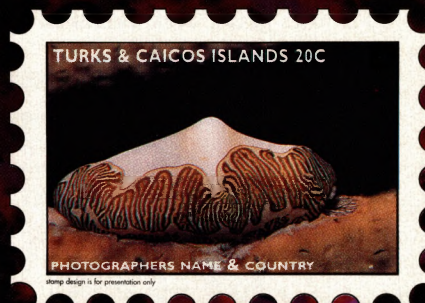
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► By **BUCK BUTLER**

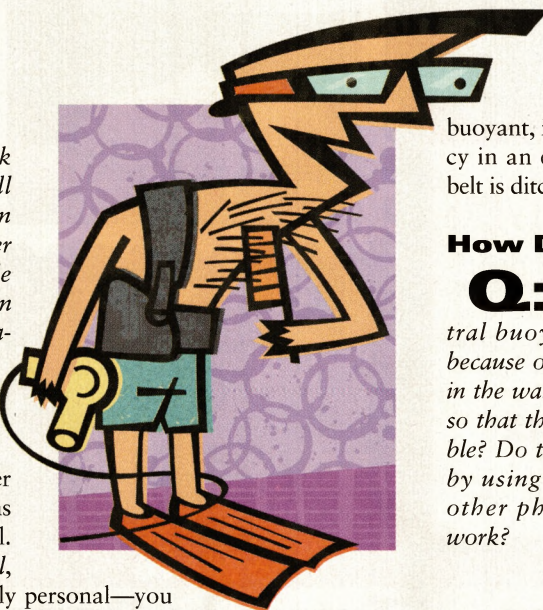
Dressing Down

Q: I'm a new diver and I recently took my first tropical dive vacation. All week on the dive boat, I was the only person not wearing a wetsuit, even though the water was very warm. I was perfectly comfortable wearing my BC over my bare chest. If I plan only to dive in tropical waters, is there any reason I should invest in a wetsuit?

T.B.
PHOENIX, ARIZ.

A: Your clothing choices in warm water are similar to your wardrobe options on the French Riviera: lots, some or none at all. If the water's warm enough to enjoy *au naturel*, the decision whether to don neoprene is purely personal—you may be the type of diver who likes the feel of a one-knot current breezing through your chest hair. But remember that wearing exposure protection doesn't necessarily mean a full quarter-inch wetsuit with hood and gloves. There are dozens of options for warm-water protection including shorties, vests and skin-thin suits. Before you flash the flounder on your next tropical reef dive, consider the advantages of some form of exposure protection:

- **Preserving body heat.** Unless you're in a hot tub, the water you're diving in is cooler than your body temperature and can rob you of heat 25 times faster than air. As a result, you can become chilled in very warm tropical water, particularly if you're thin, if you stay relatively still (as most underwater photographers do) or make several dives per day over several days.
- **Protection from the environment.** Coral, rocks and sand are all hard on your skin. The occasional bump, scrape and (ouch!) fire coral sting are an inevitable part of diving, even if you maintain excellent buoyancy control.
- **Protection from the sun.** Even worse than a coral scrape on bare skin is a coral scrape on bare, sunburned skin. Fortunately, there's one answer to both problems: cover up.
- **Protection from man-made objects.** Unexpected waves or currents can push you into dive boats, docks, the sharp edges of underwater wrecks and other objects.
- **Protection from dive gear.** BCs and packs can chafe bare skin, as can fins, hoses, knives, instruments, weight belts and straps for lights and cameras.
- **Reserve buoyancy.** If the material of the protective suit is



buoyant, it can provide reserve buoyancy in an emergency when the weight belt is ditched.

How Do Fish Float?

Q: Obviously, changing buoyancy or maintaining neutral buoyancy is a chore for divers because our bodies aren't made to live in the water. But how are fish adapted so that they don't have the same trouble? Do they cope with gravity simply by using their fins or is there some other physiological mechanism at work?

S.O.
ARLINGTON, TEXAS

A: Unlike divers, fish come fully equipped to operate under water. In fact, most of them have a body part that acts like a diver's buoyancy compensator. But because fish lack the opposable thumb needed to operate the inflate/deflate valve on a modern BC, nature conveniently put the swim bladder *inside* the fish.

Like a BC, this air-filled bag can be expanded or contracted in order to keep the fish neutrally buoyant. In some fishes, the gas bladder is open, which means that the fish must replenish the supply of air periodically by surfacing and forcing air through a duct into the bladder. Because of this, fishes with open bladders generally live at shallow depths. Closed-bladder fishes, on the other hand, inflate their bladders with gases extracted from the water by their gills. To deflate, they reabsorb excess gases back into the bloodstream. Most reef fishes have closed bladders and never need to surface.

Other fishes, especially those that spend their lives skulking around the reef and on the seafloor like blennies, lizardfish and scorpionfish, don't have swim bladders because they don't need them. Negative buoyancy is the bottom-dweller's friend, allowing the fish, often camouflaged and motionless, to lie in wait for its prey.

There are other tricks for getting around gracefully without a swim bladder. Eagle rays and manta rays, for instance, have developed pectoral fins so broad that they look and act like birds' wings. These rays lift off the seafloor by flapping their "wings" and once they've achieved enough momentum to stay afloat, they

can spread their wings and glide.

Sharks are another marvel of hydrodynamic engineering, swimming with a sinuous side-to-side motion that provides forward momentum, while pectoral fins that slope down and back like a jet fighter's wings provide lift. The bottom half of the shark's asymmetrical tail also provides some lift and the entire package is balanced for maximum power with minimal effort.

Computer Crisis

Q: *Since I bought my dive computer two years ago, I haven't made a single dive without it. I never realized how much I depended on it until recently when it quit on me at depth. I was unsure of what to do at that point. Should I ascend directly to the surface? Ascend as usual, performing a safety stop? Or share my buddy's dive computer and continue the dive?*

T.D.
RENO, NEV.

A: In an ideal world, you would have brought a back-up computer just in case your primary computer went kaput. Actually, in a *really* ideal world we wouldn't need computers or dive tables or even regulators and tanks because we'd be able to breathe under water and nitrogen wouldn't affect us and we'd be able to eradicate prejudice and war and hunger by joining hands with everyone everywhere and jumping in the water in one great worldwide scuba diving love-in.

But in this world, your dive computer is still a machine and machines fail. And when it does, you should be ready to bail out—aborting the dive and reaching the surface safely. If you've been monitoring your computer regularly during the dive, you should have a good idea of where you stand with respect to decompression. If your dive buddy is diving with a computer and you've stayed close to him throughout the dive, you may be able to use his computer to give you a general idea about your status. However, you should not share your buddy's dive computer as if it were your own to continue the dive.

Assuming you were diving within the recreational limit of 130 feet, here's the plan: First, assess the situation calmly, then move promptly to less than 60 feet. Step two: At 60 feet, slow your ascent rate to 30 feet per minute and move to 15 feet. Step three: hang there and burn air. Over-decompressing is not a concern, but the opposite is. If the last reading of your computer or your buddy's put you well in



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CIRCLE NO. 95 ON READER SERVICE CARD

the clear, this hang should serve as an extended safety stop. No need to suck the tank dry, but if your decompression status puts you at risk, use all available air just to be sure.

The Nose Knows

Q: *Sometimes when I surface from a dive, I pull my mask off and find blood inside it. I don't feel any pain, but it's still distressing. Why does this happen and is there anything I can do about it?*

P.A.
STATESBORO, GA.

A: Unless you happen to pass out at the sight of your own blood—don't laugh, it happens—you probably don't need to seek treatment for a little blood in your mask at the end of a dive. It is an indication, however, that maybe you shouldn't have been diving in the first place.

Like other body spaces, your sinuses must be equalized to match ambient pressure at depth during a dive to avoid potential complications. In most cases, blood in the mask indicates that you've suffered a sinus squeeze, in which your sinuses were blocked and you weren't able to equalize them properly.

As you descend with blocked sinuses, the pockets of air in your sinuses are compressed. There may be some pain until blood and other fluids from surrounding

blood into the nasal cavity. Voilà!—bloody mask.

There's no real trick to equalizing your sinuses. Normally, air flows freely in and out of the sinuses, allowing pressure differentials to be equalized with little or no effort. But if the sinuses are blocked for any reason, it may be impossible to equalize these spaces to the surrounding pressure.

Sinus blocks are caused by allergic reactions, colds, upper respiratory infections and dried mucus. The best way to prevent nosebleeds and more serious sinus problems is to cancel your dive when you have a cold, an allergic reaction or when you suffer from a stuffy head. If you feel sinus pain on descent, you should abort your dive. ☹

Have a question about dive equipment, techniques, marine biology, physiology, or anything else remotely related to scuba diving? Then ask RSD. Send your questions to: Ask RSD, 6600 Abercorn St., Suite 208, Savannah, GA 31405 or e-mail to: RSDmgzn@aol.com.

TIP US OFF

You're a savvy diver and you've got a boatload of little secrets that make diving safer and more enjoyable. Share your tips with our readers and we'll send you an RSD T-shirt. Send your gear, technique and travel tips to: Tip Talk, RSD, 6600 Abercorn St., Suite 208, Savannah, GA 31405 or e-mail to: RSDmgzn@aol.com.

tissues flow in to fill the remaining space. When you ascend, the air expands to fill the space again, pushing the accumulated fluids and



Tip Talk

Suit Up and Focus

Divers share a love of adventure and fun, so it's not surprising that on a boat headed out to the morning dives conversation and quick friendships pop up. I keep a disposable camera in my dry bag. You'd be surprised how quickly a new dive buddy or the entire group perks up as they pose and cut up for the camera. A couple of clicks and I have new friends and permanent mementos of my trip.

—CHRIS LOWRY, NORTH LITTLE ROCK, ARK.

Rubbed the Right Way

Rubbing alcohol—don't leave home without it. On a recent dive trip our entire group got an irritating case of swimmer's itch. I saved several friends' sanity by sharing this scratch-reliever. Also works on no-see-um bites, not to mention dirty camera connections and watery ears.

—DEANNA DENISON, HEFFLEY CREEK, BRITISH COLUMBIA

Hang 'Em High

A live-aboard dive trip does not have to mean holding your nose and gritting your teeth as you pull on soggy, smelly neoprene booties every morning. Take a metal clothes hanger for each bootie, bend the ends almost together and then about half their lengths upward to form an "L." Insert hangers in booties, zip 'em tight and hang 'em high. When done properly, the hanger should keep the bootie spread apart so that it air dries.

—CHRIS NELSON, ROXBURY, CONN.

Please Pass the Jelly

One of the problems with tight-fitting wetsuits and dry suits is that squeezing your hands, feet and head through sleeves, legs and neck seals can be more tiring than the dive. But silicone grease, baby powder and other lubricants can be messy and hard to remove. The solution: KY jelly. Slippery and water-soluble, KY lets the limbs slide through and then dissolves when you enter the water. Another plus: it won't harm neoprene or latex.

—RICHARD DODSON, MARIETTA, GA.

Send your great ideas to Tip Talk, RSD, 6600 Abercorn St., Suite 208, Savannah, GA 31405; e-mail them to RSDmgzn@aol.com. If we use your tip we'll send you an RSD T-shirt.

gear bag

3 Big Lights

If a little illumination is good, a whole lot is great. That seems, at least, to be the thinking of many night divers today. While compact lights have been popular for a few years, the Great Big Light is lately making a comeback. We reviewed the three eight-cell non-rechargeables currently on the market.

► by **JOHN FRANCIS**

UK 1200

HIT► Smooth, even illumination; good handle and switch; rubber lens guard. **MISS**► None. **BULB**► Halogen, 14 watts. **BATTERIES**► 8 D-cells. **BURN TIME**► 5-8 hours. **PRICE**► \$85 without batteries. **CONTACT**► Your local Underwater Kinetics dealer.

Brightness ★★★
Pattern shape ★★★★★
Overall ★★★

The UK 1200 can best be described as a floodlight. Its pattern of illumination is a round, even circle about two feet in diameter at five feet from the light. The center of this circle is only moderately bright compared to a spotlight of the same size, but its brightness is uniform throughout the circle and drops off gradually outside it. The edge of the circle is feathered, with no obvious line. This even pool of light gives your eye the most realistic picture of the bottom, whereas a bright spot tends to make everything outside the small "hot spot" look dark. Though the UK 1200 is a floodlight, its circle of illumination is still as bright as many smaller



EDITOR'S PICK

The UK 1200, but only by a nose. Its pool of light is slightly more uniform than the others. I liked the Pelican's dual-filament bulb, but its hot spot is too pronounced and the light is bulky.

lights with a spot pattern. And, of course, the circle is much bigger. All three lights reviewed here have the familiar V-shaped on/off switch with a switch lock. I found this one slightly easier to use with a gloved thumb than the others. The UK 1200 is available with either a pistol grip or a lantern grip. The lantern grip is angled slightly, which made pointing it feel a bit more natural. A padded lanyard is supplied.

KING PELICAN MODIFIED SPOT

HIT► Dual-filament bulb, multiple handle positions. **MISS**► Distracting "hot spot," bulky case. **BULB**► Xenon, 14 watts. **BATTERIES**► 8 D-cells. **BURN TIME**► 5-8 hours. **PRICE**► \$80 without batteries. **CONTACT**► Pelican Products, (310) 326-4700.

Brightness ★★★★★
Pattern shape ★★★★★
Overall ★★★

A unique feature of the King Pelican is its bulb with two filaments. Turn the on/off switch to the left and one filament is activated; turn it to the right and the other comes on. That way, if a filament burns out under water you immediately have a backup filament. And burn-out is more than a remote possibility. All of these lights over-drive their bulbs in search of more brightness, making bulb life short.

Something like 30 hours is typical. The King Pelican is available with either of two reflectors, a pebbled Modified Spot and a Laser Spot. Their focus can be fine-tuned for topside use by partially unscrewing the reflector housing, but under water the housing has to be screwed down tight.

In the Laser Spot, this produces an uneven beam pattern, low intensity and an annoying shadow of the backup filament. The Modified Spot reflector is a better choice, giving a smooth circle with no shadows, a feathered edge and a pronounced "hot spot" in its center which is brighter than the Power Pro or UK 1200. It is the biggest and bulkiest of the three.

The same handle can be mounted as a pistol grip, lantern grip or reversed lantern grip. A lanyard is supplied.

RATING SYSTEM

★★★★★ = excellent
★★★★ = very good
★★★ = good
★★ = fair
★ = poor



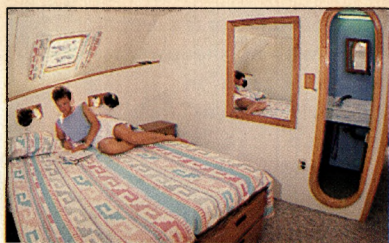
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CIRCLE NO. 26 ON READER SERVICE CARD

POWER PRO

HIT► Good pattern shape, compact case.
MISS► Switch lock difficult to engage.
BULB► Halogen, 10.6 watts.
BATTERIES► 8 D-cells. **BURN TIME**► 5-8 hours. **PRICE**► \$80 without batteries.
CONTACT► Princeton Tec, (800) 257-9080.

Brightness ★★★
Pattern shape ★★★★★
Overall ★★★★★

The Power Pro has a pattern shape very similar to the UK 1200: a smooth two-foot circle at five feet with a feathered edge. Smooth lighting is important when trying to "read" a varied surface, as dark spots will appear as false shadows. This light is slightly more concentrated in the center than the UK 1200, however, and less bright near the edge of the circle. The difference is not enough to make a



true spotlight, but just enough for confusion sometimes. Physically, the Power Pro is the smallest of the three, with a case slightly narrower than the UK 1200. It comes with a spare bulb and lanyard.

What About Rechargeable Batteries?

Many lights as bright as these, and even brighter, are available with rechargeable battery packs. Rechargeables are lighter, more economical if used frequently, and deliver lots of light. But rechargeables have drawbacks. Their initial cost is higher, and a top-quality charger can cost \$100. Though "memory" is not a problem with new nicads, they will self-discharge in a few months, and should be recharged before every use.

If you use your dive light only once or twice a year, and if it is to perform as a camping light or an emergency flashlight on the night your home power goes off, the familiar disposable batteries are probably a better choice.

Three Kids' Snorkel Sets

Sure, you can get 'em masks, fins and snorkels at K-Mart, but if you want your kids to enjoy diving, it shouldn't hurt. Comfort might be even more important for kids than for adults, and worth a higher price. That's the approach taken by three companies that make adult-style snorkel equipment scaled down for children.

GUPPY GOGGLES MASK, GILLS SNORKEL, SUPER GLIDER FINS

HIT► Scaled to fit kids; softest fit; packaging becomes a storage case and a carry bag. **MISS**► According to one kid tester, "Yellow looks dorky." **FOR AGES**► 5-10 (mask). **FIN SIZES**► 11/12, 1/2, 3/4, 5/6. **COLORS**► Blue, pink, yellow. **PRICE**► \$27 fins, \$25 mask, \$14 snorkel. **FROM**► Guppy Gear, (847) 827-3210.

Rating ★★★★★

Guppy Gear is the real thing on a small scale. The mask skirt, for example, is feathered silicone with a double-lip seal. The faceplate is tempered glass. The stylishly curved snorkel has a silicone mouthpiece and a purge valve. The bore is sized for a child's lungs and the mouthpiece is sized for a

child's mouth. It is designed to be gripped by the molars—important if your kid is losing his front teeth. The full-foot fins have a soft rubber boot. Our young test divers preferred Guppy Gear for its comfort, but wished we'd got it in blue.

EDITOR'S PICK

GUPPY GEAR: A stylish look, well-designed for kids, in packaging that becomes a tote bag.



MINI FUNVIEW MASK, FUNSTREAM SNORKEL, SPRINT FIN

HIT► Good scaling to fit kids; fair comfort; many sizes available. **MISS**► Snorkel bite tabs require front teeth. **FOR AGES**► 6-11 (mask). **FIN SIZES**► 9/11, 12/13, 1/2, 3/5 (and adult sizes). **COLORS**► Blue, pink, lime. **PRICE**► \$22 fins, \$19 mask, \$7 snorkel. **FROM**► Deep See, Inc., (800) 367-2626.

Rating ★★★



These are well-scaled for kids, though Plain-Jane in appearance. The snorkel, for example, has a small bore and mouthpiece but an old-fashioned round shaft. The mask skirt is something called "silflex," a plastic between silicone and PVC in softness. Our test divers found it noticeably less comfortable than the silicone Guppy mask, but a big improvement over the PVC mask dad bought at Target. The snorkel mouthpiece is clear PVC. It is small enough, but the bite tabs are in front, where at least one test diver was temporarily without teeth. Deep See children's equipment comes in a huge number of sizes and styles, including masks and fins for three-year-olds.

Adjustable or Full-Foot Fins?

Guppy Gear, Dacor and Deep See all sell kids' fins in both full-foot and adjustable styles. When kids grow so fast you can almost see them expand, it's understandable why parents want everything to be adjustable. But their skin is soft and life hasn't yet taught them to be stoic. The soft foot pocket of a full-foot fin is more comfortable, and our team of miniature test divers preferred them more adamantly than we think adults would have.

MINI-SPORT MASK, ALLURE SNORKEL, CORDA FIN

HIT► Best mask. **MISS**► Worst snorkel. **FOR AGES**► 4-10 (mask). **FIN SIZES**► 1/2, 2/3, 4/5 (and adult sizes). **COLORS**► Blue or pink with yellow trim; fins are black only. **PRICE**► \$20 fins, \$25 mask, \$8 snorkel, \$35 mask/snorkel combo. **FROM**► Dacor, (847) 446-9555.

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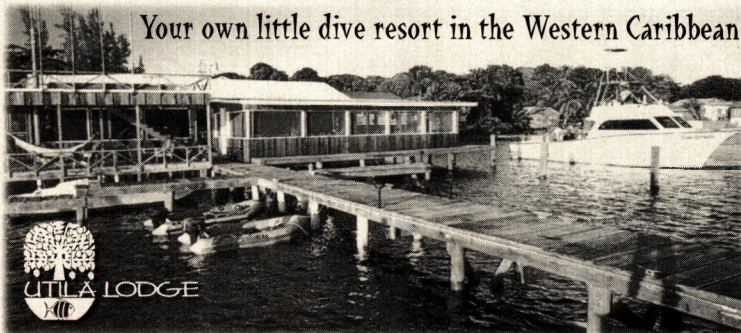


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CIRCLE NO. 11 ON READER SERVICE CARD

Rating ★★★

Dacor uses
the same
materials

for kids as

for adults: silicone

mask skirts and tem-

pered-glass faceplates. Masks come in
two sizes, the Mini-Sport (shown here)
and the larger Sport II; they bracket the
Guppy in size. The Mini-Sport has a low-

volume skirt and a big faceplate for slight-
ly more peripheral vision than the others.
It was our test team's favorite. The Allure
snorkel, however, is an adult design with
a bore and mouthpiece too big for little
kids. The fins look old-fashioned in black
but have a soft boot and float if lost, a
feature parents will appreciate. Coming
soon, Dacor says: full-foot fins in colors.



Cool New Stuff

**MX-10 CAMERA, YS-40A STROBE
AND CLOSE-UP KIT**

HIT► Good photos, simple to use, hand-
some appearance. **MISS**► Manual expo-
sure control, poor instruction booklet.
LENS► 32 mm, f/4.5, 4 elements. **CAN**
FOCUS TO► 8.3 feet (land), 4 feet (under
water). **SHUTTER**► Fixed at 1/100 sec-
ond. **FILM**► 35 mm, ISO 100 or ISO 400.
FILM WINDING► auto. **STROBE RECYCLE**
TIME► 5 seconds. **POWER**► AA alkalines
(2 for camera, 4 for strobe). **BUOYANCY**►
Slightly negative. **DEPTH RATING**► 150
feet. **OPTIONS**► 20 mm wide-angle lens
(\$278), macro lens and framer (\$161),
close-up lens (\$62), lens caddy (\$40).
PRICE► \$672, camera and strobe. **CON-**
TACT► Sea & Sea Underwater Photogra-
phy, (800) 732-7977.

Rating ★★★★★

Both camera and strobe have been
improved significantly since we first tested
them in 1992. Their depth rating is now
150 feet, for example. The strobe now has
an automatic exposure feature. Set
it to auto and the lens to f/4.5, and
the strobe automatically adjusts
light output for the correct exposure.
That means that within the range of
the strobe, at
least, you
needn't worry
about esti-
mating the



light and setting the exposure. The camera and strobe communicate via an infrared beam through a tiny window in each, so there's no cable to pierce either housing and become a source of leaks. The camera itself is a simple fixed-shutter, manual-aperture device not unlike the Brownie of yore, but with pretty good optics. Film advance and rewind is automatic. What really makes the Sea & Sea camera valuable, however, is the selection of bayonet-mounted lenses that let you try all aspects of underwater photography, from a macro of a coral polyp to a panorama of a kelp forest. A clever lens caddy lets you carry a spare lens on the top of the strobe; you can change them under water.

Pictures we took were noticeably sharper than those made by the best of the lower-priced underwater set-ups, the disposable cameras used in the Ikelite Aquashot housing. Viewfinders are always hard to see through your mask; this one is bigger than most and actually usable. An external "Sportsfinder" comes with the 20 mm lens and would be valuable with the normal lens too, however. The low-exposure warning light in the viewfinder and the exposure confirmation light on the strobe were both hard to see in bright light. Still, this camera is easy to use above water and below, and gives above-average image quality.

NEPTUNE'S NECTARS SPORTS DRINK FOR DIVERS

HIT► Liquid energy hit; electrolyte replacement; tastes better than warm water. **MISS**► Only slightly better. **FLAVORS**► Oceania Orange, Huma-Huma-Nuka-Nuka-Cocoa-Cocoa. **CONTENTS PER PACKET** (orange flavor)► 300 calories, 0 g fat, misc. vitamins and minerals, including chromium. **PRICE**► \$30 for 14 packets. **CONTACT**► Neptune's Nectars, (800) 333-0866.

Rating ★★

Real food is probably the best source of energy, but for divers who don't want to eat between dives, a sports drink may be the answer. Mixed with water, Neptune's Nectars offer 300 calories,



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CIRCLE NO. 10 ON READER SERVICE CARD

various vitamins, minerals and electrolytes, and a palatable taste. It includes antioxidants for divers worried about the purported aging effects of the additional free radicals introduced by breathing oxygen under pressure, and "Soluchrome," a soluble form of chromium, which some believe also retards the aging process. Probably the best thing about Neptune's Nectars, aside from the 300 calories, is that they induce you to drink water. We found the orange flavor drinkable, the cocoa marginal. Coming soon are Poseidon's Punch, Kuhua's Kooler and Blue Whale Berry.

PROFLO SNORKEL

HIT► Variable mouthpiece positioning; easy-off strap attachment; water barrier repels splashes; four mouthpiece sizes.

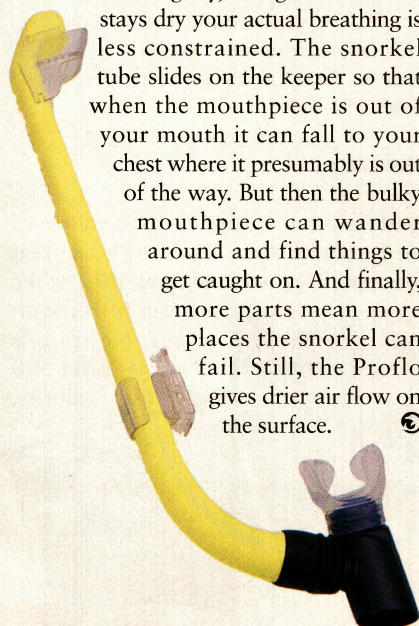
MISS► Bulky; slight breathing restriction.

PRICE► \$39, suggested retail. **FROM**► Ocean Master, (800) 841-7007.

Rating ★★★★★

If you're still using an old J-shaped snorkel, you may doubt whether anything so simple can be improved. But snorkels of the new generation, of which the Ocean Master Proflo is a popular example, do offer advantages. The mouthpiece mounts to the tube on a ball joint, making it possible to aim exactly at your mouth. The snorkel-keeper attaches to the mask strap with an easy-on, easy-off clip, and the water barrier at the top of the tube really does keep out splashing water. I used it while swimming at top speed, flailing the water with my arms, and the Proflo stayed dry. With my old snorkel, I had to purge before breathing in those conditions. Of course progress has a price. The water barrier restricts air

flow slightly, though since the air stays dry your actual breathing is less constrained. The snorkel tube slides on the keeper so that when the mouthpiece is out of your mouth it can fall to your chest where it presumably is out of the way. But then the bulky mouthpiece can wander around and find things to get caught on. And finally, more parts mean more places the snorkel can fail. Still, the Proflo gives drier air flow on the surface. ☺



dive deals

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If your travel is booked before Dec. 15, 1997, you'll stay one night free and receive one free dive. Seven nights' accommodations, continental breakfast and dinner daily, welcome cocktail, four two-tank dives, day tour to the ruins where you can spend the afternoon in a jungle spa or horseback riding, unlimited use of nonmotorized water-sports equipment, air transfers from Belize City to San Pedro, water taxi transportation to the resort, and taxes and gratuities is \$982 per person, dbl. occ. For details or to book, call (800) 460-5665.

BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS

► The TRIMARINE BOAT CO. LTD. has added to the onboard activities on the *Cuan Law*, making it possible for nondivers to have as much fun as divers. The boat now has a hobie cat, three kayaks, waterskis, kneeboards and a scurfer. Shoreside activities like beach barbecues are also included. Four instructors on board offer resort, open-water, advanced and specialty courses. A one-week trip costs \$1,495 per person. Call (800) 648-3393 for more information.

FAJARDO, PUERTO RICO

► From June 1 through Nov. 15, 1997, daily rates for a one-bedroom casita at EL CONQUISTADOR RESORT & COUNTRY CLUB start at \$375 (maximum four persons), \$475 for two bedrooms (maximum six persons), and \$575 for three bedrooms (maximum eight persons). The Las Casitas Village package includes 24-hour concierge service, two rounds of golf on the resort's championship 18-hole course, \$25 casino match bet per adult, airport trans-

fer from San Juan, unlimited use of the fitness center, continental breakfast daily, 50 percent discount on meals at any resort restaurant for kids under 12 years old, and daily admission for kids to the supervised activities at Camp Coqui. And don't be surprised when you find your favorite flowers and reading materials on the night table. Call (800) 452-2274 for details.

GRAND BAHAMA

► In just three hours, novices begin a resort course in the pool in the morning and dive shallow reefs by afternoon at the UNDERWATER EXPLORERS SOCIETY (UNEXSO), the people who pioneered the concept of big animal adventures. The cost of the lesson, equipment and guided boat dive is \$79 to \$89. This is a perfect way for your nondiving buddy to make that initial plunge into diving. For details, call (800) 922-DIVE.

EDITOR'S CHOICE Grand Cayman

There are so many goodies and discounts in the fall special from RED SAIL SPORTS—"I Did It All"—that we can't list them all here. The special runs from Sept. 1 to Dec. 15, 1997, and starts at \$435 per person for a four-day, three-night stay, a savings of up to \$31 a day off the regular diving rates. Plus, you can save up to \$65 per night with reduced hotel rates. Divers receive a "passport" that offers discounts on restaurant meals, watersports and car rentals and a free T-shirt. The package includes two-tank boat dives daily, either an afternoon or night boat dive and unlimited shore diving. Accommodations are at the Hyatt Regency Grand Cayman, the West-in Casuarina Resort or the Villas of the Galleon condominiums. For more information, call GoGo Tours at (888) 885-4237.

GRAND CAYMAN

► BOB SOTO'S DIVING, LTD. is offering a "Cayman Gold" package with Treasure Island Resort, their new headquarters. Seven-night packages cost \$899 per person, five-night packages, \$699. Call (800) 767-3023 for more information.

NEW PROVIDENCE, BAHAMAS

► Do you have a 12- to 15-year-old looking for an adventure on your family's next vacation? STUART COVE'S DIVE SOUTH OCEAN now has a "Juniors Dive Free" program that allows any certified junior diver at the resort to dive for free when accompanied by a paying certified parent or guardian over the age of 18. For instance, a seven-night package for four people staying in a standard room at South Ocean with six days of two-tank dives would cost \$2,736. For a family of four, including two certified junior divers, the cost is \$1,550, a savings of \$1,186. The package is based on quad occupancy and includes hotel taxes and gratuities, six days of two-tank dives, and tanks and weights. Call (800) 646-3333 or (954) 524-5755.

NORWAY

► Every year, in October and November, resident pods of orcas follow migrating herring into the deep, dark and cold waters of Norway's fjords. World-renowned underwater photographer AMOS NACHOUM is leading two live-aboard expeditions, Oct. 24 through Nov. 1 and Oct. 31 through Nov. 8, to find and photograph the orcas. Instruction in dry suit diving and super wide-angle and ambient light photography is included. Call (415) 923-9865 for information.

OUTER BANKS, N.C.

► Recreational, technical and Gulf Stream wreck diving are offered by OUTER BANKS DIVING aboard the six-passenger, 34-foot *Mac*, April through November. Custom videos and rental gear are available. A two-tank recreational dive is \$75 per person; call for group rates and multiday discounts. Divers receive a 10 percent discount on room rates at the Atlantic View Motel in Hatteras. Call (919) 986-1056.

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

► Experience PNG aboard *Paradise Sport*, the new live-aboard from MIKE

BALL DIVE EXPEDITIONS, available for trips in 1998. The 100-foot live-aboard will take 20 divers on three itineraries: Milne Bay, known for its biodiversity and its photographic opportunities; Kavieng, featuring pelagics and silver-tip sharks; and the Wreck Special, including dives on the B-17 bomber *Blackjack*, the *S' Jacob* and the *Yokohama Maru*. 1998 rates from: 7 nights, \$1,840, 8 nights, \$2,146, and 10 nights, \$2,376, excluding airfare. Call (888) MIKE-BALL for details.

PLACENCIA, BELIZE

► KITTY'S PLACE offers three two-tank dives to sites on the more than 400 square miles of reef off Placencia in its five-day "Scuba Dive Package For Two." Through Nov. 15, 1997, standard accommodations for five nights, three two-tank dive tours, breakfast and dinner daily, lunch on dive days, round-trip transfers from Belize International Airport, all taxes

(except exit) and service charges is \$650 per person, dbl. occ. Call (011) 501-62-3227.

ST. LUCIA

► If you're ready to book a diving vacation in 1998, you'll want to consider the "Early Bird Group Package" offered by ANSE CHASTANET, the only resort located in the heart of St. Lucia's two-year-old marine reserve. Groups of at least eight who book before Aug. 31, 1997, get seven nights of accommodations, 12 boat dives, breakfast, lunch and dinner, tax and service charges, and airport transfers, for \$1,649 per person, dbl. occ., Jan. 7-March 31, 1998, and \$1,249 per person, dbl. occ., April 1-16 and Aug. 1-Sept. 30, 1998. Divers can substitute up to two night dives for an equal number of day dives, plus enjoy extra scheduled shore diving and complimentary snorkeling, ocean kayaking, windsurfing and sunfish sailing. For more information, call (888) GO-LUCIA or (758) 459-7000.



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BAJA CALIFORNIA

Los Islotes, Sea of Cortez

Sea lions and subsea tunnels. Are you ready for a south-of-the-border adventure?

► BY JOHN FRANCIS

The anchor splashed down, and as we started jumping in so did the sea lions, barking and sliding off their rock benches, then swimming out to greet us. This was shaping up like a Sea World show.

Los Islotes is famous as one of the largest sea lion rookeries in the Sea of Cortez. It's also the friendliest, probably because frequent contact with divers has made these sea lions curious instead of fearful. We were visiting Los Islotes in early August, when the season's pups were old enough to be playful, their mothers were not as protective, and the bulls, having long ago won or lost the battles of mating season, were less aggressive.

I descended along the anchor chain to about 20 feet and began swimming toward the rocks. Immediately, I was dodging small brown torpedoes. Or trying to dodge them—the pups rocketed past me almost before I could flinch. It soon was obvious, however, that the pups were just playful, like hyperkinetic adolescents. They rushed at my face and veered off, jetted tight circles around me and shot between my legs, blowing bubbles, teasing me, begging me to play.

Several adults hovered more sedately in the background—mothers, probably, as if

relaxing on a park bench while the children let off steam. They were good-humored too, and willing to visit for a moment with a stranger. One approached with wide brown eyes, sniffed my outstretched finger and gracefully slid away.

The sea lions were fun, as always, but there was something else I wanted to see. Los Islotes is a small

group of connected pinnacles stretching east to west. Near the east end, a tunnel cuts from one side of Los Islotes to the other. It's about 80 feet long, 20 feet wide and half-full of water. With air always



STEVE ESSIG

MAP BY IRIS MEKKER

DIVE USA

overhead, it's a safe transit for divers. As I entered from the south, light faded through neon aquamarines and cobalts to a gray gloom in the middle of the tunnel. Suddenly a large pelagic jack shot out of the darkness and passed beneath me, followed by two more. I began to notice more fish apparently using the tunnel to commute from one side of the island to the other. I continued, daylight opening in front of me as twilight closed in behind, until I'd cleared the tunnel.

The north side of Los Islotes is a jumble of bare rocks and boulders sloping down to the sand at 90 feet. There seemed to be less life here, and I turned right to circle the east end of the tiny island and so return to my starting point.

At the end of the island I found a garden of gorgonians and fans attached to small pinnacles and detached rocks. Wandering through the garden were schools of brightly colored damselfish, sergeant majors and parrots. I'd been told big sharks and manta rays patrol here

too. That shadow! Was that ... ? Maybe, but it was gone. So, with barely 500 pounds remaining, I rounded the end of Los Islotes, and my new sea lion friends welcomed me home.

Dive In



Location

Los Islotes is just off the north end of Isla Partida, about 30 miles north of La Paz in the southern Sea of Cortez.



Water Temperature

From November through March, water temperatures are in the 60Fs, climbing to the 80Fs by July.



Profile

November through March, storms may reduce visibility to 20 feet or less. During spring, it will rise to 60 feet or more and by July it may exceed 100 feet. Under water, Los Islotes slopes down to a sand bottom at about 90 feet on the north side and about 60 feet on the more protected south side.



Operators

Baja Expeditions, (800) 843-6967 or (619) 581-3311, runs day trips from La Paz and dives Los Islotes during week-long trips on the 80-foot live-aboard **Don Jose**. The live-aboard **Solmar V**, (800) 344-3349, also cruises Los Islotes during week-long cruises. **Baja Diving**, 011-52-112-21826, in La Paz, offers day trips to the island.

SOUTHEAST

Bay Ronto, Fla.

Four hundred feet of ship, plus a few 300-pound jewfish, multiplied by hundreds of barracuda. A good wreck dive? You do the math.

► **BY BRET FORBES**

On the hour-and-a-half ride to the *Bay Ronto* off Venice, Fla., I kept working speculative math problems, trying to calculate the inflation factor of all the stories I'd heard about this 400-foot steamship. For years I'd listened skeptically to tales of face-to-face encounters with 300-pound jewfish and schools of six-foot barracuda. It was time for me to take personal measure of this west Florida wreck diver's legend.

The part about the barracuda was true enough. Before the torpedo-shaped outline of the ship materialized from the white sand bottom, we descended through a cloud of hundreds of steely sentries.

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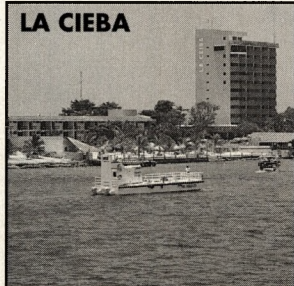


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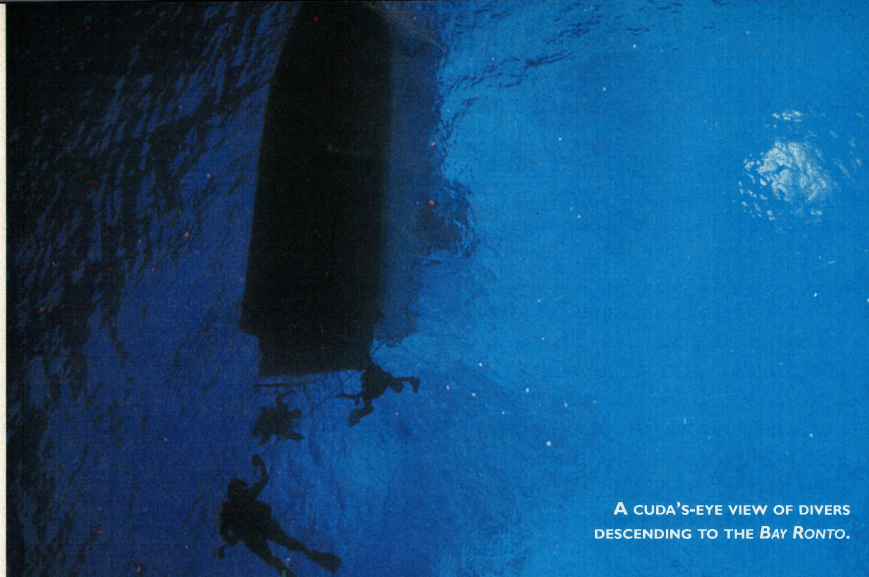
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A CUDAS-EYE VIEW OF DIVERS
DESCENDING TO THE BAY RONTO.

These four- to six-foot barracuda hover motionless above the wreck, closely guarding the secrets of their adopted domain.

The *Bay Ronto*, an 11,000-ton British steamship, was sailing from Galveston, Texas, with a load of wheat when she foundered 30 miles off Venice, victim of a Sept. 11, 1919, hurricane. Luckily, all of her crew made it to lifeboats before she went down.

The ship came to rest upside down at 100 feet and has become an oasis of fish life in a desert of sand. Streams of snapper flow in and out of splits in the hull, where

awaits a dangerous netherworld of fish. Portions of the interior have begun to collapse, making penetration unwise for anything without gills, but it's the perfect jewfish habitat: deep, dark and impenetrable.

I swam forward, peering into every hole, hoping for a glimpse of the massive fish, but was skunked at every turn. Between openings, I admired the soft coral encrusting the *Bay Ronto's* hull and the magnificent specimens of thorny oysters with claw-like spines protruding from their shells.

There! Near the bow, a huge jewfish

peered out from beneath a protruding overhang, 350 pounds if he was an ounce. I readied my camera and finned over, just a little too fast. The jewfish saw me coming, turned shy and backtracked into the bowels of the wreck, refusing to come out. The legends were true, I had seen the proof, but I hadn't gotten it on film.

Next time.

Dive In



Location

Thirty miles off Venice, Fla. The wreck can be reached from Venice or Sarasota, Fla.



Water Temperature

Summer temps range from 80F to 85F; winter temps from 65F to 70F.



Profile

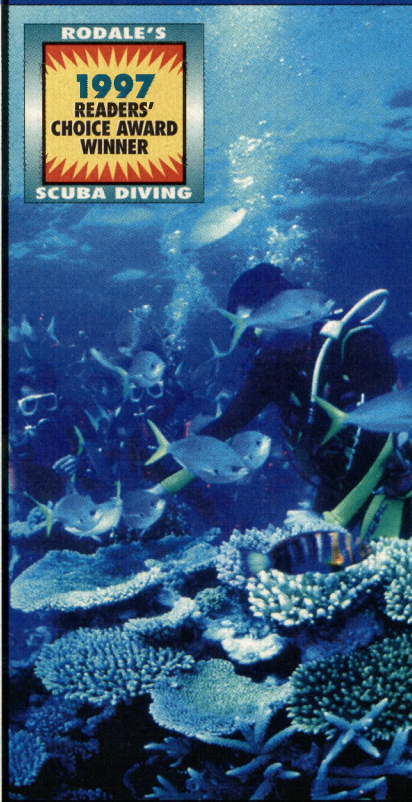
Visibility averages 25 to 50 feet, but at times can exceed 100 feet. The wreck sits on a sand bottom at 100 feet.



Operators

Several operators in the Sarasota area offer excursions to the *Bay Ronto*: **Florida Down Under, Inc.**, (941) 922-3483; **Dolphin Dive Center** (941) 924-2785 and **Scuba Quest**, (941) 366-1530. From Venice, you can reach the wreck with **Florida Gulf Coast Divers**, (941) 483-3483 and the live-aboard **Ultimate Get-away**, (941) 466-3600.

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DIVE USA

NORTHEAST

Weetamoo, Lady of the Lake, N.H.

Elegant steamers of a bygone era beckon divers into the chill of New Hampshire's mountain lakes.

► BY JERRY SHINE

The White Mountain foothills of New Hampshire offer pristine forests, picturesque hiking trails, and—surprise—good wreck diving.

Back in the 1800s, the state's two largest lakes, Sunapee and Winnepesaukee, were hopping resort areas where tourists traveled via fleets of steamboat ferries. An elegant means of transport, but as cars became more common, the ferries went the way of the dinosaur.

Most were dismantled and pulled from the water, but two of the largest were scuttled intact. Today, they lie on the bottom, preserved in the chilly water as icons of an outmoded form of transportation.

Weetamoo, a 50-foot double-decker that carried up to 200 passengers, went to the bottom in 1926 and now lies upright at 70 feet in Lake Sunapee. The wreck is marked by several white subsurface buoys onto which you can moor and then use to make your way down to the wreck. It's possible to penetrate through the pilothouse, then cruise down to the lower level, past her steam engine and boiler, and into her passenger area. A row of rectangular window openings on each side lets in a good deal of light and helps eliminate some of the claustrophobia, but you'll still need a flashlight to make the trip through the wreck. Visibility is generally around 20 feet on the *Weetamoo* and like any wreck, she attracts plenty of fish, including bass, perch, trout and salmon.

From Lake Sunapee, a two-hour drive to the northeast takes you to Winnepesaukee and the wreck of the *Lady of the Lake*. Sunk in 1895, the 125-foot vessel, which once carried up to 400 passengers, now rests upright and is largely intact. Her owners intended to sink *Lady*

in deep water but she foundered and made an unscheduled stop at only 30 feet.

Her engines and much of her superstructure were removed before sinking, but you can still swim through numerous deck and hull openings. Visibility is usually in the 30-foot range, and divers frequently find bass, perch, sunfish and carp in her hull. The site is usually marked with a surface float.

Dive In



Location

Lake Sunapee is located east of Newport, N.H., on State Road 11 between the town of Sunapee and I-89. Lake Winnepesaukee is located south of the White Mountains National Forest and east of I-93.



Water Temperature

Expect average visibility of 20 to 30 feet at both wrecks. Boat traffic is heavy at both sites, so surface with caution, fly a dive flag and stay close to your boat.



Profile

Expect average visibility of 20 to 30 feet at both wrecks. Boat traffic is heavy at both sites, so surface with caution, fly a dive flag and stay close to your boat.



Operators

Both lakes have a waterfront dive shop. At Sunapee, it's LaPorte's Skin Diving Shop, (603) 763-5353. LaPorte's doesn't run charters to the wreck but will give you detailed instructions needed to find it.



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Aquatic Adventures (603-863-4148) offers charters to the wreck, and several marinas on the lake rent boats. At **Winnepesaukee, Dive Winnepesaukee** (603-569-8080) runs charters to Lady each Sunday.

GREAT LAKES

Lake Erie Islands, Ohio

The shoals of the shallowest Great Lake are walleye-to-walleye with ships.

► **BY DONNA MARCHETTI**

Fifteen feet down the anchor line I pause to soak in the pea soup tint of western Lake Erie. Here in the shallowest portion of the shallowest Great Lake, visibility fluctuates wildly between zero and 20 feet depending on runoff and storms.

So why dive here? In a word, shipwrecks. More than a dozen islands spread across the western basin of the lake. Their surrounding shoals spelled doom for hundreds of sailing ships, a dozen or so within easy reach for area dive operators.

I'm on my way down to see the *Philip*



Minch, a 290-foot wooden steamer that caught fire and sank in 1904. Although the *Minch* was dynamited to lessen the hazard for passing ships, it's still largely intact, sitting upright in a bed of silt and muck 45 feet below the surface. The engine lies twisted on its side with a boiler resting at a 45-degree angle. Wooden beams and exposed ribs are covered with zebra mussels and patches of freshwater sponges, and you can swim the length of the ship, peering down at large walleye through holes in the deck planking.

The *F.H. Prince*, another victim of Lake Erie's ravages, is probably the best-known wreck in the area. The 240-foot wooden freighter sank in 1911 after heavy

winds smashed it into a shoal. Tucked into a protected area just offshore from Kelleys Island, its shallow depth, about 15 feet, makes the *Prince* a good dive for novices.

Dive In



Location

The Lake Erie Islands can be reached from marinas in Sandusky, Marblehead and Port Clinton, Ohio.



Water Temperature

The dive season runs from May through September, with water temperatures ranging from the 50Fs in spring to the mid-70Fs in summer.



Profile

Visibility can range from zero to 20 feet with occasional peaks of 30 feet.

Most of the wrecks are shallow enough for beginners, but divers should have good buoyancy skills to avoid stirring up the silty bottom. Boat traffic is heavy and it is illegal to remove artifacts from any shipwrecks in the area.



Operators

Area dive shops include **Dale's Diving Shop** in Sandusky (419-625-4134), **New Wave Dive Shop** in Port Clinton (419-734-2240), **North Coast Scuba** in Marblehead (419-798-5557). Area dive charters are available from **Sea Wolf Charters** (419-626-3260), **Myrmidon Fishin' Ful Dive Charters** (419-734-9711) and **Adventures in Diving** (216-572-2005).

DONNA MARCHETTI



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At the Bay Islands Beach Resort on Roatan, Ted and Cam O'Brien have created the perfect balance between a highly professional full-service dive operation and a laid-back, intimate bed-and-breakfast style dive resort. With only 24 - 38 guests each week, it is easy for them to adjust schedules, meals, and activities to their guests' desires. The resort's highly successful "Rent The Entire Resort" plan allows dive clubs, dive shops, group leaders and scuba instructors use of the resort's facilities and staff. An ideal place to take groups!

Bay Islands Beach Resort is 44 acres of panoramic waterfront and hillside within the Marine Reserve. A two-story Spanish-style plantation house and beach villas sit amidst beautifully landscaped property with fruit and nut trees, flowers, and towering coconut palms.

Just off the beach is the famous Spooky Channel, one of the best shore (and boat) dives on the island. Swim

through an eerie crack in the reef which opens onto the breathtaking wall. Or snorkel along the pristine reef and view the spectacular display of fishes and corals.

Eight-day packages include seven nights' air-conditioned accommodations, 16 boat dives (two in the morning, one in the afternoon, one night dive), unlimited shore dives and three delicious meals a day. Festivities featured are the Tabiyana Beach picnic trip, Land Crab Safari, the traditional lobster buffet and Limbo and Punta Party with music and dancing on the beach.

BOOK IT! Group leaders call for "Rent The Entire Resort" details. An individual seven-night package is \$725 pp/do; non-divers, \$650 pp/do. Call your local dive shop or Bay Islands Beach Resort toll-free at (800) 4 ROATAN or (561) 624-5774, fax (561) 624-7751.

Big City Diving

A gumshoe's guide to diving uptown in America's 10 busiest cities. ▶ By BOB FRIEL

The lettering on my door says Spear, Sam Spear and I work a desk: the Travel Desk. Anyway it was just another day sitting sharpening my dive knife—because you just never know—when the door swung open and trouble shuffled in wearing size 6 open-toe fins.

Her name was Bubbles and just by the looks of her I could tell she was in it deep—probably right up to her manta ray necklace.

"So what's your story kid?"

"You gotta help me, Sam," she pleaded. "I ... I need to know where I can dive. I don't need those glossy, sun-drenched islands that you rum-soaked writers always go on about. I'm a city girl, Sam, but I love to dive."

"What kind of cities are you interested in?" I asked cautiously.

"I like 'em busy, full of life: big populations, lotsa tourists, lotsa conventioners, you know: the most visited places in the country," she said. "I gotta know Sam—which ones are worth packing a reg for?"

I decided to level with her. "Listen Sister Swimfins, these kinda cities you're talking about don't always have easy diving. It's not all soft corals and butterflyfish, warm water and good vis, you know. Big-city diving can be cold, harsh and it can serve up its water chunky style. But if you give it a chance, it can also dazzle you with sights you'll never see in the trendy tropics."

She shuffled around my desk and leaned down. If Bubbles got any closer I'd need a chamber. "I can take it, Sam," she whispered. "I'm advanced."

"OK kid, I'll give ya the skinny on big-city diving." I've always been a sucker for a pretty facemask.



New York



NEW YORK

The City▶ You talkin'ta me? A lot of people say they wouldn't be caught dead in this city but, then again, a lot of people have been. A city of lights, a city that bites, the greatest collection of cultural attractions in America and a complex nexus of neurosis. Below is a world where massive, brightly colored schools swirl around fantastical struc-

tures, escaping the endless circling of predators—and we're not just talking about the subway.

The Dive► The armored cruiser *USS San Diego* first sailed in 1907 as part of Teddy Roosevelt's Great White Fleet. She served throughout World War I until she was sunk in 1918 by a German mine. The 504-foot-long *San Diego* rolled as she sank and lies upside down in 110 feet of water. Structure starts at 70 feet. The stern is opened up and makes for the easiest penetration, but care must be taken inside the wreck. Lobsters fill the nooks while fish gather above the incredible bulk of the ship.

The Skinny► Dive stores in the city or boroughs can set you up with rental gear and a charter. Visibility ranges from eight to 80 feet—count on 30 if it isn't too rough. Below the thermocline, summertime water temperatures average in the 50Fs.

Important Safety Tip► An offer of "sleeping with da fishes" does not mean a night dive.

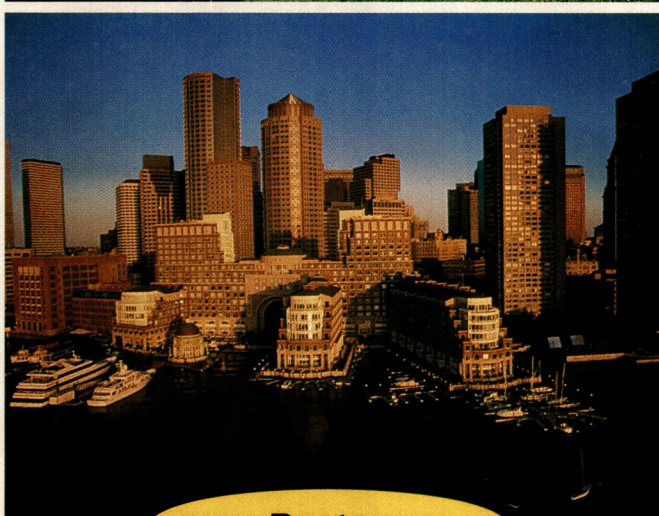
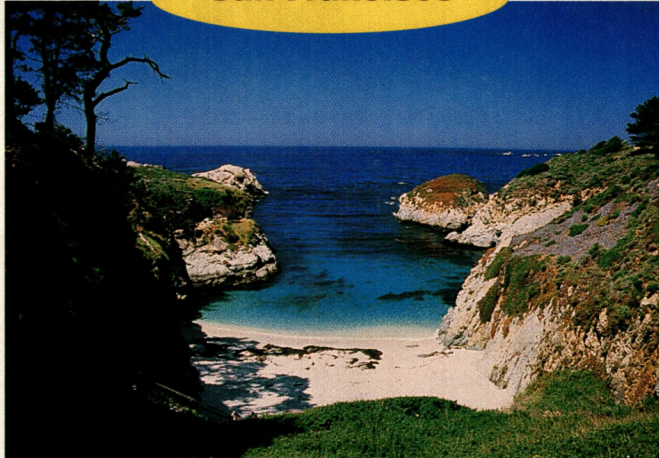
LOS ANGELES

The City► The "made for TV" city where the Haves have to excess and the Nots are pissed. A sprawling circle of hell that would make Dante dizzy, in L.A. every divemaster has written a screenplay and every boat captain wants to direct. It's the one city where topside visibility is often worse than under water.

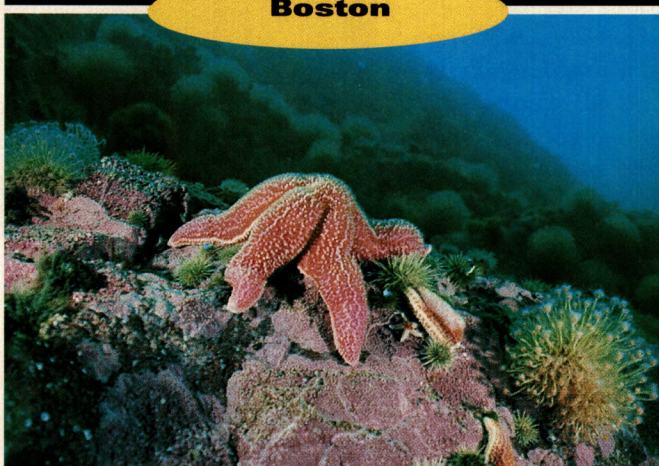
The Dive► Eventually, the best diving will be just west of the San Andreas fault (marine charts of the stars' homes!), but for now the Channel Islands are the primo sceno dude. Santa Catalina Island has long been the escape from L.A. and offers divers a "best of" of California diving. Shark diving, seals, sea lions, kelp forest communities. Farnsworth Bank, a very fishy seamount



San Francisco



Boston



just offshore the island, is encrusted with rare purple corals and yellow colonial anemones.

The Skinny► Dive boats that leave Long Beach and San Pedro ports for day trips year-round (winter storms permitting) charter through local stores. You can also fly out and dive with the operators based on the island. Call the Santa Catalina Island Visitors Bureau for names and numbers (310-510-1520).

Diving here is everywhere from 20 feet to over 100 feet. Water temp ranges from 50F to 70F and visibility averages 60 feet.

CHICAGO

The City► The city where the river turns green every St. Paddy's Day has food fests, jazz and blues, the Mackinaw Run, Lakefront Festival, the Bears, da Bulls and the general funkiness of Wicker Park as attractions for the topside visitor.

The Dive► Wells Bert was a 200-foot-long, three-masted schooner that went down in the 1860s three miles north of the city. A gale took the ship and kept 17 of her crew. The hull is still intact, protected as a historical site, with mud puppies milling inside the cargo hold and bass and perch holding above the capstans and deadeyes. Max depth: 40 feet.

The 360-foot-long *Material Service* carried stone and iron across the lakes and went down just 80 blocks south of the Loop in 1936. Lake ice has chopped up the hull but there's still nice penetration into the holds. It's possible to get into the engine room but, with the dark and the murk, not so easy getting back out. Max depth: 40 feet.

The Skinny► Diving season lasts from

TOP: MASSACHUSETTS OFFICE OF TRAVEL & TOURISM/ PHOTOGRAPHER KINDRA CLINEFF; BOTTOM, DAVID HALL

TOP: SAN FRANCISCO CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU PHOTO BY KERRICK JAMES; BOTTOM, NORBERT WU

spring until the fall gales when it truly becomes the Windy City. Mid-summer surface temperature can rise to the low 70Fs but a serious thermocline will slap you in the face with a 20-degree drop as you head down. Vis varies from five to 50 feet. Dive stores in town will set you up.

BOSTON

The City► Ahh Bahhhston—the history, the Irish pubs, Fenway Park, the Irish pubs, Boston Common, walking the Freedom Trail, riding the “T” to the Irish pubs ... such is Boston. Thirty miles north of the city is Cape Ann: Massachusetts’ other Cape, a rocky dollop at the end of a peninsula jutting out from the coast.

The Dive► Gloucester is the city on Cape Ann where the Gorton Fisherman hangs his floppy yellow hat, and base camp for the best beach diving in New England. The Cape’s granite and bedrock coastline offers all manner of shore dives: from rappelable rocky cliffs to sandy beaches, and always a leeshore. Folly Cove, up at the northern point, has sheer walls that tower above you on shore then plunge to 60 feet beneath the surface. Green sponges, pink coralline algae, frilled white anemones, purple, blood-red and orange starfish, lumpfish, lobster and bold-striped bass that local divers have eating out of their hands all call the cove home.

The Skinny► May to October water temps range from 50F into the 60Fs, with vis 15 feet to 25 feet. November to April temperatures hover and shiver in the 30Fs and 40Fs (that’s when they harvest the frozen fish), but the vis climbs to 50 or 60 feet. Cape Ann Divers Ltd. (508-281-8082), offers a free guided shore dive every morning at 10 a.m. and also rents equipment and runs local boat trips.

SAN FRANCISCO

The City► I left a heart in San Francisco—that’s why I’m now at the Travel Desk: because there ain’t no second chance when you’re transporting organs. San Fran, the Big Hilly, is everyone’s favorite city. Restaurants, shopping, scenery, Fisherman’s Wharf: it’s all in the pretty City by the Bay.

The Dive► A side trip down to Monterey. Worth it for the drive, the town and the aquarium, Monterey also offers a great beach diving intro to

the Left Coast’s cold, kelpy conditions. Lover’s Point is a sheltered spot two hours south of San Fran with great animal life, consistent 20-foot visibility and easy access along the rocky shore. There’s dive action from the surface to 40 feet with plenty of starfish, rockfish, halibut and often sea lions. A bit further south, Point Lobos State Reserve offers several sites with better vis (up to 80 feet), easy access, seals, otters, great kelp, and an amazing assortment of fish and invertebrates.

The Skinny► Monterey peninsula offers the most protected diving in all of Northern California. Winter’s got the best vis; summer the best kelp. No dramatic thermocline; just cool, upwelled water around 50F year-round.

Dive stores in San Fran and Monterey all rent gear. In Monterey they also offer guided dives. Access is limited at Point Lobos: make reservations up to 60 days prior to your visit at (408) 624-8413 or e-mail ptlobos@mbay.net. Cost: \$7 per team of two to three divers.

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ORLANDO

The City► The Big Cheesy, The Mouse That Scored. You have kids—you're going to Disney World! Welcome to the Magic Kingdom, where hours of your life magically disappear while you wait in lines wondering which magic fairy emptied your wallet.

The Dive► M-I-C, See you on the bottom! K-E-Y, Why? Because this may be the single most impressive thing a mommy or daddy diver can do in front

of their younger kids: dive in EPCOT's Living Seas aquarium. They'll love watching you swim up past the sharks and turtles to wave hello. You also get to see behind-the-scenes at a Disney exhibit. The Living Seas staff will give you a tour of the facilities and, if you ask politely, they'll show you how Walt Disney's frozen head is used to chill the water for the penguin exhibit.

The Skinny► It's a small world but it ain't cheap—\$140 gets you behind the glass and includes all equip-

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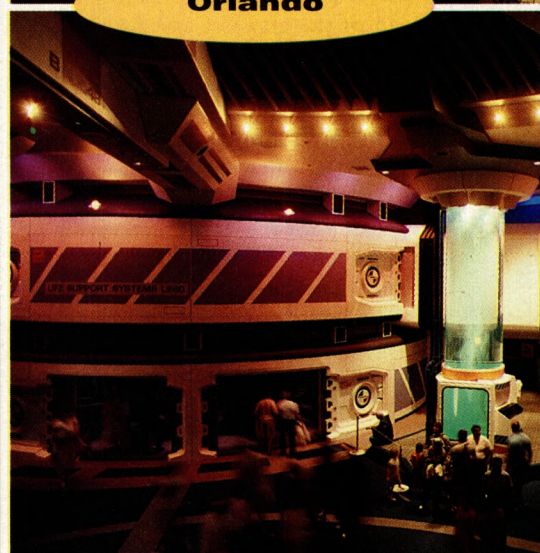
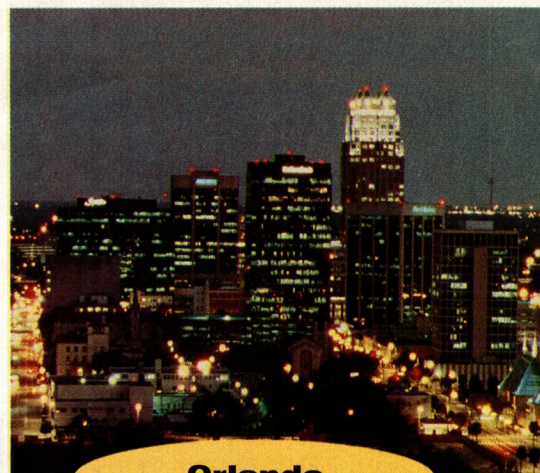
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ment. You can bring your own mask but that's it—they supply everything from regs to wetsuits to ensure no strange bacteria is introduced into the aquarium. The dive lasts a half hour but the entire experience, including briefings, donning and ditching, and watching the video of the dive (a \$35 option), will last as long as three hours. Make reservations well in advance: (407) WDW-TOUR. Only 16 divers per day: one group at 4:30 p.m. and another at 5:30 p.m.

ATLANTIC CITY

The City► Trump buses belch battalions of bespectacled biddies into Trump buildings to battle Trump's one-armed bandits while old salesmen in checkered sport coats, flush with free Trump drinks and cheap cigars, blackjack their kids' inheritance.

The Dive► The entire Jersey coast is encrusted with wrecks—Trump Lagoon?—and one of the best is a veteran of the Normandy invasion, the oceangoing tug *Great Isaac*. The *Isaac* collided with the *SS Bandeirante* in 1947 and the

BOTTOM PHOTO BY TIMOTHY O'NEEFE



185-foot-long tug hit its final beach 90 feet down, nine miles off Barnegat Light. Divers reach the wreck at 60 feet and the burly tug is covered in mussels and lousy with lobster. Sea bass and tautog hold the high ground while flounder stick to the bottom.

The Skinny► Traditionally, New Jersey has a six-month dive season: May to October, but boats are busiest in the summer. Vis is best before the June bloom but still averages 30 feet on the *Isaac* throughout the summer. Late summer water temps can reach 70F at the surface, 55 to 60F down under. Local shops will point you to charter boats north and



south of AC.

MIAMI

The City► These days "Miami" is South Beach: an exciting, topless Dizzyland of models, model wanna-bes and model wanna-be-withs. It's a city that never quite sleeps, it just staggers off Ocean Drive and passes out on the beach. International to the max, English is the third most popular language after Spanish and high-season Euro-babble.

The Dive► Dade County has an extensive artificial reef system to match South Beach's artificial reality. Water towers, passenger jets, army tanks, oil rigs, derelict ships ... you think it, we'll sink it. *Proteus* was a 220-foot freighter dropped into 75 feet of water off Key Biscayne in 1985. What was a great, big wreck is now a greater, bigger reef thanks to Randy Andy (the hurricane). Lotsa growth, lotsa fish, the wreck is a bended, folded, spindled and mutilated mass of penetrable metal.

The Skinny► Boats leave from the bayside of the South Beach and from marinas along the causeway that connects the beach and mainstream mainland—\$35 for two tanks. Best visibility and sea conditions are in summer with 80 feet of vis through 85F water. Winter water temp drops to 70F and the visibility—that varies with the sea conditions—ranges from 30 feet to Gulf Stream clear. For more information, call the Greater Miami Convention and Visitors Bureau (305-539-3000).

NEW ORLEANS

The City► Whooo-eee: The Big Easy. In Nahlins, I étouffée. Then I et some gumbo. Then I et jambalaya and a po'boy and a pound of crawfish and washed it all down with a busy summer's worth of Pat O'Brien's Hurricanes. Come here for Fat Tuesday and stay that way every other day of the week—the food is that good. Also enjoy fine shopping for alligator heads and voodoo charms.

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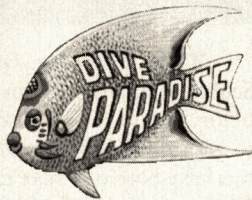
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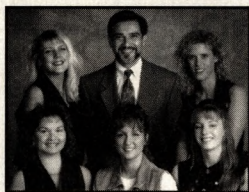
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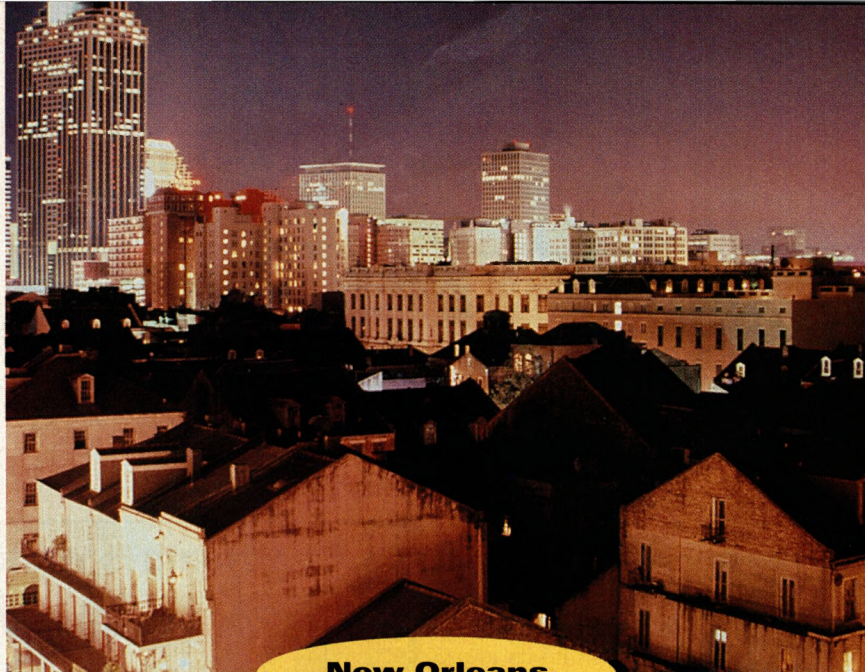
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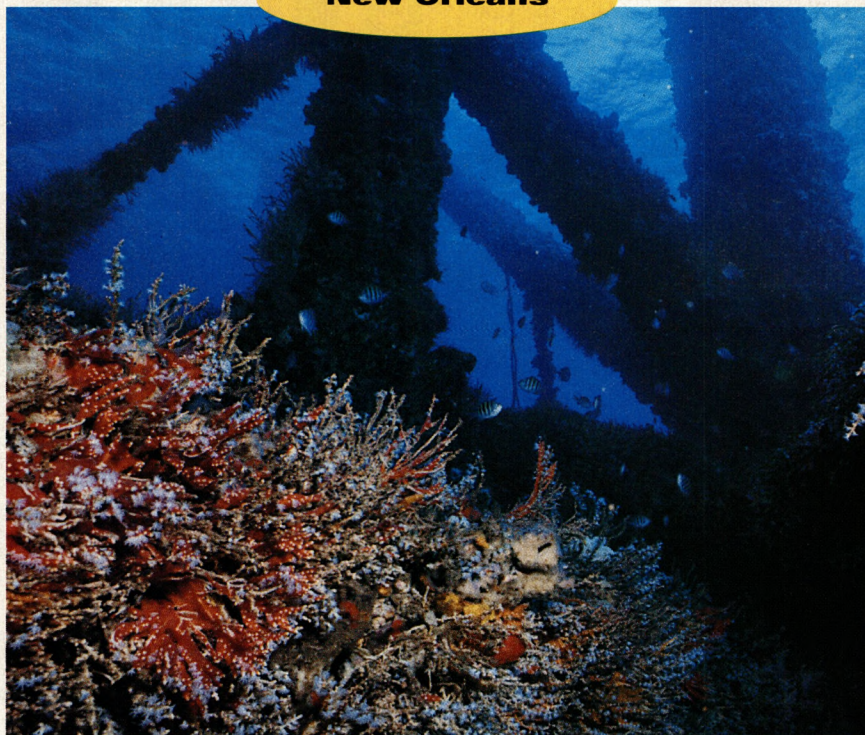
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New Orleans



TOP, SUSAN LEAVINES; BOTTOM, DAVID TAYLOR

The Dive► Dig the rigs. The Scuba Company will van you out of town before sunup for an all day three-tanker to the Gulf rigs (\$80 van/boat/ice). The oil rigs have been out there for 40 to 50 years attracting a jambalaya of fish life, including amberjack, grouper, shark, redfish and even tropicals that hide from the big 'n' nasties beneath the bell-shaped overlaps on the rigs' legs.

The Skinny► Winter vis is best when the scenic-stealing plankton is gone but the seas are iffy. Winter water drops to near 60F while summer stays in the balmy high 80Fs. "Water's so warm in summer all you need is a coonass wet-suit (ratty jeans and an old long-sleeve

shirt) to protect you from the scrapes," says John Nuckley of The Scuba Company (504-244-6292). Summer vis depends on how the river flows and the wind blows but it's not unusual to have a cold, dirty layer of Ol' Miss mud on top of warmer, 100-foot-plus visibility seawater.

Buoyancy Tip► Use two extra pounds of lead for every beignet you eat at Café du Monde.

SEATTLE

The City► The Big Rainy. A great walking—well, sloshing—city. After you've climbed the Olympic Mountains



Seattle



and Space Needle, had your body pierced, met with Bill Gates, been hit by a flying salmon at Pike Place Fish Market and been fitted for a flannel wetsuit, it's time to go diving.

The Dive► Just 25 minutes out of Seattle is Edmond's Underwater Park. The dive area includes pilings from an oil dock and an old dry dock that acts as a wall to give you a lee from the current which, with the 10-foot tide, can rip. White frilled anemones, barnacles, algae, small crabs and tube worms bring solid surfaces to life while rockfish, large lingcod and big-headed cabezons swim, sit or swirl about the structure. Max depth: 30 feet.

The Skinny► An anchored line leads you around the underwater park. Watch out for the ferry that crosses Puget Sound to a close-by dock. Visibility is best (up to 60 feet) in early spring before the plankton gets thick. Spring is also the time to dive to watch the fish laying and guarding egg masses. Summer vis averages 15 to 20 feet and bottom temp around 50F degrees. You can rent equipment nearby at Underwater Sports (206-362-3310). ☉

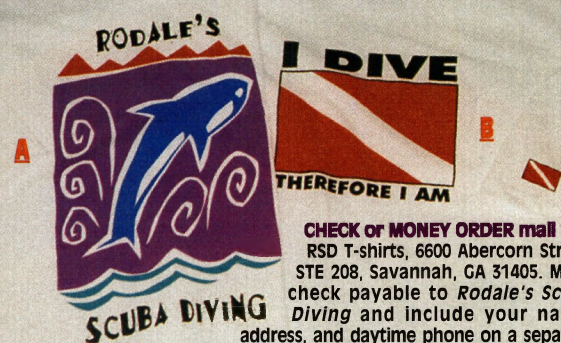
RSD field editor Bob Friel hails from Philadelphia—*The Big Scrapple*.

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TIMOTHY O'KEEFE

I first found my Keys

16 years and a few thousand dives ago. After diving the frozen muck of Pennsylvania quarries and dark, chilly wrecks off New Jersey (and loving every minute), I jumped off a boat in Key Largo—Molasses Reef. Looking down from the surface, I

finest aquarium.

It's estimated that more than a million divers come to Monroe County, Fla., each year. Some are just finding their Keys, others are keeping in touch. For newcomers, I suggest you try each section of the Keys until you find one that fits—each is unique in temperament, temperance and attractions, not to mention diving. To those of you coming back for the Nth time, you're getting easy to spot with your ratty, rum-stained copy of *Islands in the Stream* and that glassy-eyed look as you daydream about how to stretch your vacation. And finally to those who haven't been back in a while, who've bypassed our homegrown reefs on the way to some sexier dive destination, all I can say is that there's nothing worse than losing your Keys.

Key Largo and the Upper Keys

From Lake Surprise to Tavernier Towne, Key Largo is Dive Central USA. Dive shops here are thicker than bugs on the teeth of a happy biker. You want service and selection? You got it.

As you drive along U.S. 1, your first impression may be that Key Largo is thoughtlessly overbuilt and way too close to Miami for its own good. You'd be right. The Keys, like the rest of the banana republic of Florida, have never met a developer they didn't like and, even with seemingly draconian construction limits and regulations, the building continues. Greed is god. Force your eyes away from the strip malls and keep your blinders on until you're facing down a Florida Bay sunset or until your dive boat nears the outside reef and you see that sharp blue edge of the Gulf Stream slide in over your dive site—either way you've already found the real beauty of the Keys.

Southwest of Tavernier you see less dusty



TIMOTHY O'KEEFE

white cement and more green mangroves. Civilization and solid ground begin to thin out. The balance of the Upper Keys down to Long Key is scattered with dive shops, marinas and hotels and is more famous for its fishing than its diving. The road between here and Key West spends as much time over water as it does land and the competing views of bay and ocean make it U.S. Wonderful.

The Diving ▶ Location, location, location. The reefs of the Upper Keys are stuck between a rock and a good place. The solid mass of Key Largo blocks water

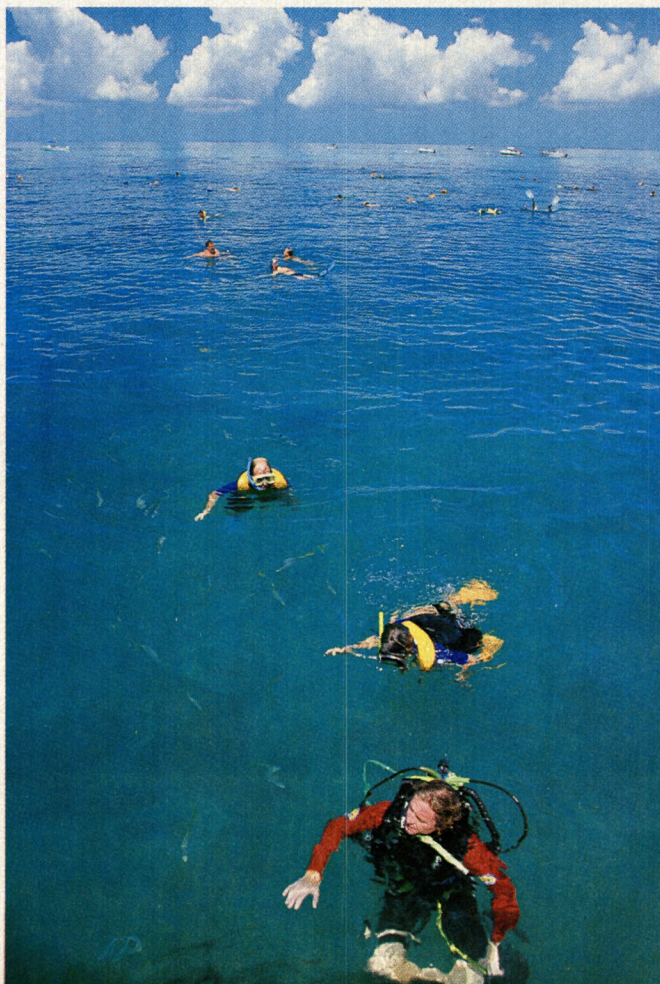
GREAT WHAT?

Yes, Virginia, almost every year there is a great white shark caught off the Keys—they come down in the winter like everyone else. What does a 17-foot shark that usually munches on whales and seals eat in a coral reef environment? Anything it wants. Will it eat you? Nope. Will you get to see one? Nope. Should we all be happy that they are finally being protected along the U.S. East Coast? Yep.

instinctively threw my hands out in front of me to keep from hitting the coral 20 feet below. This water was clear. This water was warm. Best of all there was life: impractically colored and impossibly abundant life all around me. I sank into a sand channel and knelt, awestruck—a nearly lifelike decorative statue bubbling away in the world's largest and



MARK LAWRENCE



BOB FRIEL



KEY DEER

When you hear people describing the endangered Key deer—tiny, diminutive, microscopic, etc.—you expect to find animals small enough to use as Christmas ornaments. Well, they're not. I mean sure they're smaller than your well-fed whitetail but, hey, Key deer gotta live on scrubby Keys grass and maybe a coconut or two. And yes, they're cute—name a fuzzy big-eyed creature that isn't.

Seriously, the Key deer are very endangered. Unlike other rare creatures, these are easy to find in their own habitat—including front yards and roadsides on Big Pine Key. Turn at the sign for the refuge, MM 31, and then drive slowly and carefully around the development. The police are very serious about speed limits on U.S. 1 in the clearly marked Key deer territory—cars being the deer's unnatural predator. Every time I drove through on a recent trip, the police had someone pulled over.

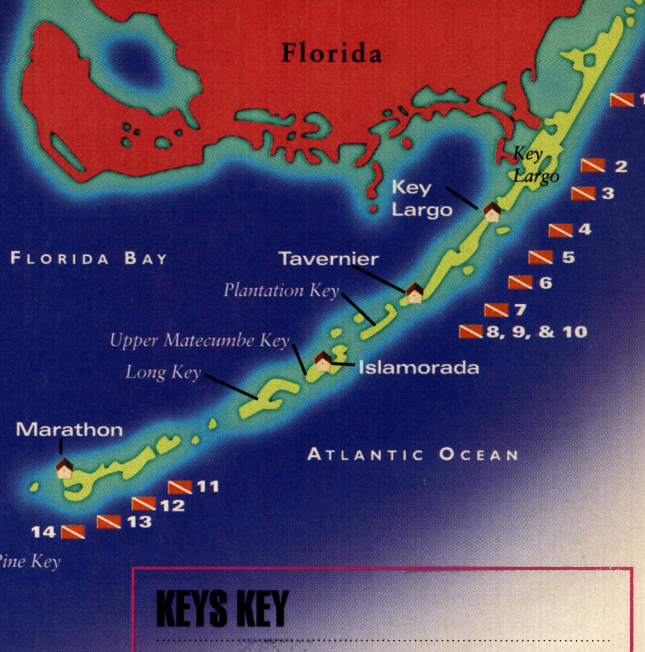
from Florida Bay, water that would limit coral growth, from flowing out onto the reef. On the other side is the Gulf Stream, the almost mythical ocean river of warm, clear water that allows these massive bank reefs to thrive at this northern latitude—the extreme for reef-building corals.

Beach dives are rare in the Keys—almost as rare as beaches. The mangroves that line the coast provide shallow snorkeling and a fascinating look at a nursery for the reef animals. Coral growth starts a couple of miles offshore with patch reefs



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- ▶ Conch—no take.
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| 5. Molasses | 11. Coffins Patch | 17. Western Dry Rocks |
| 6. Duane/Bibb | 12. Delta Shoal | 18. Sand Key |

Dive In



Wet Web

For a great site on the web for Keys diving and general info as well as links to National Weather Service weather buoys that can give you almost real-time wind info from Key Largo to the Dry Tortugas, dial up: <http://florida-keys.fl.us/diving.htm>.

The "official" Keys web site, <http://www.fl-keys.com>, wasn't nearly as useful for dive information. Info on dive shops, accommodations, restaurants and bars on both sites is limited to those businesses that advertise.



Weather

Daytime temperatures average around 80F in January and low 90Fs in the heat of late summer. Diving is year-round with the best conditions from May to September with calm seas and clear water—except locally during hurricanes. In October you have to start watching for cold fronts moving out of the Northwest, which can periodically blow out the diving. Water temperature rises from a winter low of 72F to the mid-80Fs in August.



Diving Conditions

Range from the easiest, bright, shallow coral gardens to deep wrecks with raging currents and everything in between. The "average" Keys dive would be a 30-foot reef dive with slight current and 60 feet of horizontal visibility.

Visibility ranges from 30 feet when winter storms stir up the bottom to 100-foot-plus anytime the blue water moves in. Outside reefs average 80 feet in the summer, inside reefs slightly less.



Chambers

Mercy Hospital, Miami, and Mariner's Hospital, Marathon.



separated by sand flats and sea grass beds. The shallow reef line starts at three miles with the star attractions four to six miles offshore. Reefs here feature 50 species of corals, more than 10 times that many species of fish and invertebrate critters. Don't dive here because it's less expensive than a trip to the Caribbean, dive here because these are wonderful reefs with animal populations that surpass almost anything you'll find overseas. Shallow or deep, reef or wreck, day or night—if you get bored, check your pulse.

You'll Love ▶ A sunset dinner on the deck at Sundowners, MM 103.9. Ask for Dolphin Lorenzo—not the cook but the fresh mahi-mahi and lobster specialty.

Good ole food at Hobo's and Mrs. Mac's Kitchen. Good ole seafood at the Fish House.

The "Pain in the Ass" at Holiday Isle—not the annoying bar rat on the next stool but the mix of frozen piña colada and frozen Rum Runner that is truly the Slurpee of the gods.

Accommodations ▶ Key Largo and the Upper Keys offer everything from the ritziest resorts to the moldiest motels. Because of stiff competition for diver dollars, your best bet is to book a

dive and hotel package with one of the dive operators. They'll give you a selection of lodging at good rates and you also save money on the diving.

Conch to Cudjoe Key

Encompassing the Middle and Lower Keys to within 20 miles of Key West, this is bridge country. Today you drive on the third incarnation of the overseas artery. First came Henry Flagler's Folly: the railroad that sailed the sea until a hurricane blew it away in 1935. A road was then laid down from Largo to Key West using the railroad's embankments and bridge supports—track was even recycled as railings. The first road bridges were narrow two-laners that made the longest span—the famous Seven Mile Bridge—seem much longer, especially at night. The current bridges were built in the 1980s with the old ones left standing alongside in many places to be used for fishing, walking and Schwarzenegger movies.

There is great diving and about a dozen dive operations along this stretch, but don't wear your "I love the Marine Sanctuary" T-shirts into any strange bars. This is commercial fishing land and many who pull their living from Keys waters feel the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary is a threat to their livelihood. Most are reasonable, but these islands do have a considerable infestation of Keys Rats: sunbleached shaggy guys with beer-bleary eyes, knives on their belts and dried blood (fish blood except Friday nights) on their torn Guy Harvey T-shirts.

The Diving (Above Seven Mile Bridge) ▶

The Seven Mile Bridge may be a wonder of engineering, but divers would rather it were the Seven Mile Dam when the green Florida Bay water flows through it on the outgoing tide. Offshore, however, the water clears quickly and from Grassy Key

to Marathon there's a nice section of healthy shallow reef, the wreck of the *Thunderbolt* and the massive spurs of Sombrero Reef.

The Diving (Below Seven Mile Bridge) ▶

Looe Key has the best reef below Key Largo and it's also easy diving. The greatest risks you'll face here are coming up on the wrong boat and snorkelers decorating your dive bag with partially digested croissants. Visibility is generally very good and mainly affected by sea conditions—wave action can stir up the sand over shallow areas and suspend it over the reef. The best diving is along the well-defined coral spurs of the central reef—the overstocked aisles of this sea life supermarket.

Accommodations ▶

You've got a much slimmer selection here than in the (Continued on page 90)

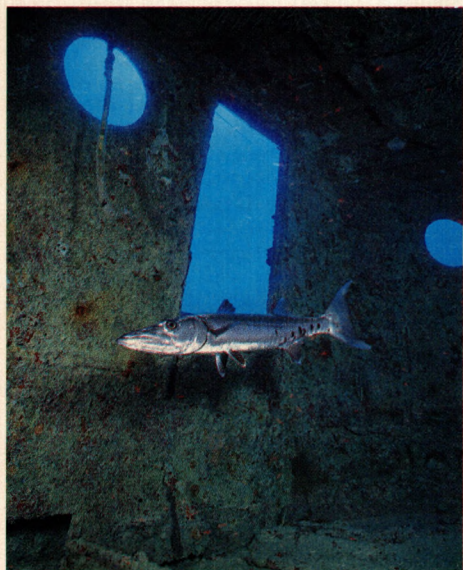
PROTECTION

Now as never before, these are Your Keys. The Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary is a reality and, at least from the high-water mark on out, the entire nation has a stake in the health of the Keys ecosystem. Ever since a future-sighted University of Miami marine biologist and hell of a nice guy, the late Dr. Gilbert Voss, called for the protection of the reefs back in the late '50s, the Keys have been recognized as a unique and fragile natural wonder that must be preserved. Over the years, portions of the reef have been given legislative safeguards: Pennecamp, Key Largo National Marine Sanctuary and Looe Key National Marine Sanctuary. FKNMS now provides a blanket of protection for over 2,800 square miles of marine ecosystem. Divers coming to the Keys will find that the best sections of many of their favorite reefs have become SPAs (Sanctuary Preservation Areas) where diving is still allowed but fishing is not.

PROHIBITED ACTIVITIES WITHIN THE SPAS

Touching living or dead coral. Possessing, moving, harvesting, removing, taking, damaging, disturbing, breaking, cutting, spearing or otherwise injuring any coral, marine invertebrate, fish, bottom formation, algae, sea grass or other living or dead organism, including shells. Or attempting any of these activities.

Fines are allowed up to \$100,000 but will probably be more in line with present policy at Looe Key NMS: Touch a coral? \$25. Take a shell? \$50. Get caught with a speargun? \$50—unless you actually hit something, then it's \$150.



Florida Keys Dive Sites

Key Largo and the Upper Keys

Carysfort

This large, unusual, sine wave of a reef is as far north as the Largo operators dive. A forest of branching corals thins as it drops from the surface to a sand firebreak at 65 feet. Offshore, the reef builds again and sweeps up bright schools of tropicals before cresting at 35 feet and spilling over the deep drop.

French Reef

The Disney World (in a good way) of Keys reefs. Coral caves, caverns and crevices create a wonderland for divers to explore. You can dive French from the surface to the drop-off at 90 feet but the best caves are in 25 to 40 feet. Hourglass and Christmas Tree Cave are two of the most interesting. Eels and lobsters love the ledges and hollowed sections of reef are filled with copper sweepers always glad to bounce your strobe back in your face. Every kind of reef creature can be found above, below or inside the varied structures—bringing a light.

The Elbow

The Elbow is the hinge on which the Keys reef turns to the west. It hangs a bit offshore and attracts wrecks like President Clinton attracts independent counsels. The *City of Washington*, a steel freighter that went down in 1891, is the site where barracuda have painstakingly trained Captain Slate to hold a fish in his mouth. Other wrecks include the Civil War Wreck (wooden timbers), Mike's Wreck (steel plates) and bits of chain off the steamer *Towanda* and a cannon off an unidentified wreck. All dives are shallow, down to 30 feet.

Molasses Reef

Sweet old warhorse of Pennekamp Park, Molasses is the most-visited piece of underwater property in the world. And it deserves to be. It is the Sears Studio of fish portraits for photographers and hosts every reef creature you're likely to see in Florida. Molasses sees the blue water more often than other Keys reefs and the healthy stream keeps the water clear and gives the corals the best living conditions. You can have a great dive anywhere from 15 to 50 feet or you can swim southeast to the 100-foot drop-off where a great hammerhead and I once surprised each other.

Dry Rocks

God the Father, God the Son, God the Snorkeler? Dry Rocks is home to Christ of the Abyss: the nine-foot, 4,000-pound statue standing in 25 feet of water that has become a symbol of the marine sanctuary and assures that anyone destroying the coral goes straight to hell. The site itself is inspirational with omniscient-size brain coral, multiplying fishes and big cudas to keep the Big Kahuna company. Fire coral encrusts part of the statue; supposedly the truly virtuous can rub their cheeks on it and not feel the sting.

Benwood

This 285-foot freighter was running without lights to avoid the U-boats of '42 when she was rammed by another Allied ship also running dark. The *Benwood* staggered inshore only to hit the reef north of French where she sits today with her flattened stern in 25 feet and partially intact bow pointing offshore in 50 feet of water. There is not much natural reef around the wreck so her remains, further insulted by bombing practice, have become the major fish factory of the area.

Duane

This 327-foot Coast Guard cutter was a hero in World War II for sinking a U-boat before being sunk herself for another heroic cause: taking some diver pressure off the Keys' natural reefs. She sits, listing only slightly to starboard, in 120 feet of clear Gulf Stream water. You can touch superstructure at 55 feet and descend from there to her weather deck at 90 feet. Almost 10 years of marine growth add interest to the awe of seeing such a great ship sailing through a sea of schooling pelagics.

Bibb

Duane's twin, the *Bibb* rolled when she sank and lies on her starboard side in 130 feet of water. The shallowest section of the *Bibb* is at 90 feet and divers are more exposed to the current here than on the *Duane*. Both wrecks were made "diver safe" though the *Bibb's* attitude

makes her a more confusing, and more dangerous, penetration. Current should be expected on both wrecks and can be strong enough to cancel dives—it can also be expected to bring by all kinds of creatures of the Big Blue.

USS Spiegel Grove

As tough as the *Duane* and *Bibb* sister act is to follow, the 510-foot *Spiegel Grove*, an island-sized monster of a ship (as we went to press, scheduled to go down in early June), should become an instant hit. This will not be an artificial reef, but an artificial wall with structure from 40 to 100 feet.

Pickles

Off Tavernier, Pickles is a shallow (10 to 25 feet) reef named either for Buddy's wife on the "Dick Van Dyke Show" or for the pickle-barrel shaped kegs of cement off an old wreck found at this site. Scattered wreck remains, macro subjects like flamingo tongue snails and nice stands of pillar coral make this a great second dive.

Conch Reef

Conch Reef offers both shallow and deep dives (10 to 90 feet). There are some good pillar coral and rolling hills of reef with healthy fish populations at shallow depths. Sixty feet down on Conch is a 30-foot drop-off, a Caribbean-type wall, complete with small pinnacles and coral chutes. Deep-water soft corals and barrel sponges hang off the wall in the very clear, sometimes strong, current.

Hens & Chickens

Frank Perdue would have a coronary if he saw chickens this big. This is a collection of patch reefs just offshore that looks like a huddle of chicks around one mother of a hen. It's shallow, 10 to 20 feet, and the vis varies with the tide, but the site is very popular with fish and has good soft coral growth.

Davis Reef

Buddha's likeness in a sandy patch here adds another major religion to the Keys' reefs. There is a nice, moray-friendly ledge inshore of the reef crest while the offshore edge attracts massive schools of fish especially in summertime. Depth ranges from 10 to 80 feet.

The Eagle

A 287-foot freighter sunk off the outer reef, *Eagle* lies at 110 feet with 12 years of growth on her. The superstructure starts at 70 feet and there is easy penetration into cargo holds and aftercastle, but the current that brings big fish and clear water can also fly you right by the wreck if you're not careful.

Middle Keys Sombbrero

Boats crowd around the tower marking this massive reef like they're doing a hat dance, but once you get under water, the colors and life are splattered across the site as if you'd burst the big piñata. High-profile spurs of coral are undercut with ledges and covered in sea fans. The most notable formation is the Arch, a coral rainbow eight feet high. Intricate structure in the shallow areas (five to 25 feet) make this an excellent night dive.

Delta Shoal

The best diving on the Shoal is around the big coral bommies that lie scattered seaward of the big coral spurs like pool balls after a good break. All manner of reef life gather round the shallow (20 feet) heads with fish coating the tops and lobster and eels poking out from below. The Ivory Wreck, a slaver also carrying elephant tusks, ended its sordid career on Delta Shoal in the 1850s but very little of the ship remains above the sand.

Herman's Hole

This is a shallow site (15 to 30 feet) shaped like a giant doughnut after Homer Simpson has had a few bites. There are inside and outside ledges filled with multiple morays, gagges of grunts and samples of every angel found in the Keys.

Samantha's (aka Shark Ledge)

Nice mixed reef structure on this shallow dive (25 feet) with sand patches between coral mounds and irregular spurs. A lush collection of sea fans and prolific fish life is enhanced by almost guaranteed sightings of nurse sharks. One operator is now feeding the placid sharks that can usually be found inside low-profile coral caverns.

Coffins Patch

Huge, centuries-old brain corals headline this shallow

(eight to 18 feet) site. Lobster are common in the hollows beneath the big cranium corals and schools of goatfish, snapper and grunts laze about the area during the day. Pillar Patch is about a half-mile offshore. Coffins and is covered with the stalagmite-like growth of its namesake coral.

Thunderbolt

The Ben Franklin of boats, *Thunderbolt* was named for the electrical experiments run off the ship. After her wartime mission of laying mines, the 189-foot *Thunderbolt* was used to drag cables around the ocean trying to attract electricity just like Ben and his kite. The big cable wheel on her stern and the big cudas always manning her bridge lookout are highlights of the wreck.

Looe Key

In 1744, the captain of the *HMS Looe* ran his ship onto a perfect little reef in the Middle Keys. The *Looe* christened the reef with its name and "down the loo" was, in all probability, just where the captain's naval career went after the grounding. I've always thought of Looe Key as a pocket Pennekamp: take the best of Largo's reefs, shrink it a bit and carefully construct the model reef. It is a textbook spur-and-groove formation with long, well-defined fingers of coral separated by sandy grooves that transport sediment away from the reef. From east to west, the reef gains depth, and from the shallowest patch reef to the edge of the drop-off, Looe Key is crowded with life. The strict no-take protection has filled the sanctuary with cocky lobster and loads of friendly fish.

Key West

Sand Key

This tiny island six miles off Key West provides a lee so when the wind blows and seas rise you're going to Sand Key. The captain will try to sneak as far to the seaward side of the island as the seas allow to reach the best sites such as Grand Canyon. Here, huge mountains of star coral are undercut on all sides and filled with fish. Between the corals is the swim-through canyon. Dives at Sand start with elkhorn at the surface, then lead to a low-profile reef studded with big coral heads at 30 feet and a drop-off at 50.

Fathom Ledge (Western Dry Rocks)

Clear water and a deeper (40 to 50 feet) spur-and-groove reef with plenty of caves and sharp ledges attracts fish and thrills divers. There's a good elkhorn forest inshore (10 to 20 feet) and the ledge itself (60-feet-plus) is covered with healthy soft corals. A longer boat ride, but worth the trip.

Lost Reef

A shallow, 200-yard-long reef. You hit the sand at 30 feet and explore high-profile coral ledges that tower above you. Nice soft coral growth along the top edge of the reef with colorful encrusting sponges and all kinds of daytime and nighttime fish under cover of the ledges.

Joe's Tugboat

In a cool bit of Conchmanship, a local Joe allegedly kidnapped this 85-foot tug to save it from being taken north as part of Miami's artificial reef program. He towed it out to a nice spot, dropped it on an even keel in 65 feet of water and went on the lam. Key West divers will be forever grateful. Filled with snapper and grunts, covered with cuda, home to protected jewfish and often awash in clear Gulf Stream water, the fully intact Joe's Tug is a wonderful set for pictures.

Cayman Salvager

The gods must be crazy about divers. As the 200-foot-long steel buoy tender *Salvager* was being towed to very deep water to become a fishing reef, the tow cable snapped and the ship settled in a very diveable 90 feet right next to the deep drop-off. You'll hit her weather deck at 60 feet, and a nice current brings good vis and big fish. First divers down see the jewfish.

Wilkes Barre

The mother of all Keys wreck dives is this 610-foot light cruiser that's been down at 320 feet for 25 years. Even her towering superstructure doesn't start until past your bedtime and a dive to the deck is 210 feet down. This is a technical dive and should only be done by very advanced divers led by those local operators who supply extensive prep work and briefings. Your reward is big scary fish and nitrogen-enhanced awe at the incomprehensible sight of a fully intact warship.

Florida and Florida Keys Advertising Directory

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(800) 4-AMORAY, (800) 426-6729, (305) 451-3595; fax (305) 453-9516 • Dives Key Largo National Marine Sanctuary, John Pennekamp State Park, Elbow Reef, French Reef, Molasses Reef, Horseshoe Reef, Little Conch Reef, Carysfort Reef, Christ of the Abyss, Conch Wall, USCGC Duane and the Spiegel Grove. An intimate Caribbean-style dedicated dive resort overlooking Key Largo's Florida Bay. Speed to dive sites aboard the *Amaray Diver*, a 45-foot custom catamaran, powered by two Mariner outboards. Eco-tours and sunset tours. Open-water referrals and certifications. • Best package (off season): 3 days/2 nights, five two-tank dives (can substitute for night dive or *Duane* trip), \$300, plus tax, based on standard room.

Capt. Billy's Key West Diver Inc. (Key West)

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Florida Keys Dive Center (Plantation Key)

(800) 433-8946, (305) 852-4599; fax (305) 852-1293 • Dive reefs, wrecks, walls, Pennekamp Park to Alligator Reef, *Duane*, *Bibb* and *Eagle* wrecks. PADI 5-star facility specializing in personalized training, open-water through instructor. Nitrox training. Dive boats directly behind facility. Customer gear storage. • Best package: Fall (Sept. 6-Dec. 20, 1997), one-bedroom condo, two-tank dive, tanks and weights included, continental breakfast, \$97 per day, per person, dbl. occ.

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Ocean Pointe Resort (Plantation Key)

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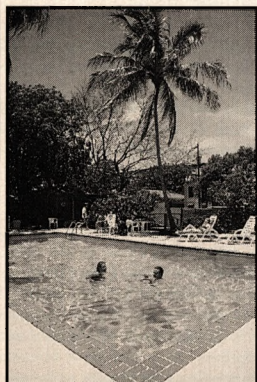


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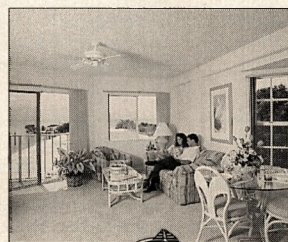
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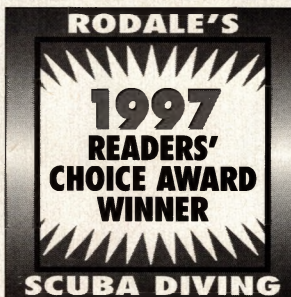
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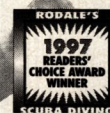
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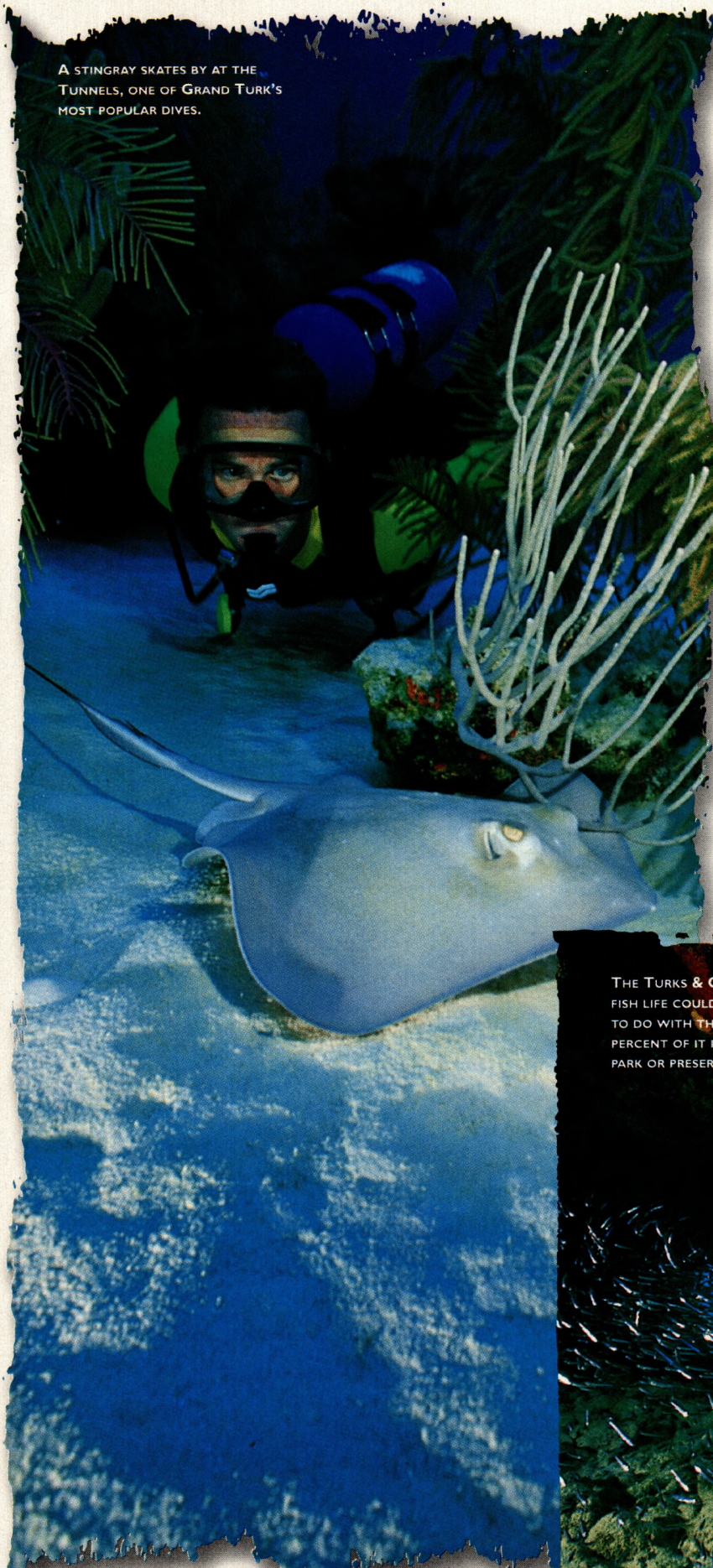


The Turks & Caicos Islands have long been a thoroughfare between old worlds and new, an oft-overlooked landfall for explorers and pioneers busy going somewhere else. One of the first after the Arawaks was Chris Columbus, who dropped in on Grand Turk's Guanahani Beach in 1492 while looking for a quick way to the Far East. Ponce de León, searching for the Fountain of Youth, stopped by in 1512, and John Glenn, first American to orbit Earth, splashed down east of the islands after his historic spaceshot in 1962.

Since the only people in a rush around here are just passing through, one can expect that change comes slowly. The first car didn't arrive until four years after Glenn's visit. That was about the same time that development began on Providenciales (Provo)—and its airport wasn't built until 1968.

Still today you feel like a pioneer treading unfamiliar territory. Talking to people before my trip, I would get an all-too-familiar "Turks and who?" followed immediately by a "where the heck is that?" Priding myself on geographic savvy, I had the pre-fab answer: "575 miles southeast of Miami, at the end of the Bahamas chain. It's a crown colony of Great Britain, and is well-known for offshore banking, beaches and diving."

And what diving it is. Being locked away in the dark closet of anonymity has protected the health of the islands' marine environment and some of the best wall diving this side of Cayman. Sometimes it's nice to stop and rest for a while, and let others pass right by.



A STINGRAY SKATES BY AT THE
TUNNELS, ONE OF GRAND TURK'S
MOST POPULAR DIVES.

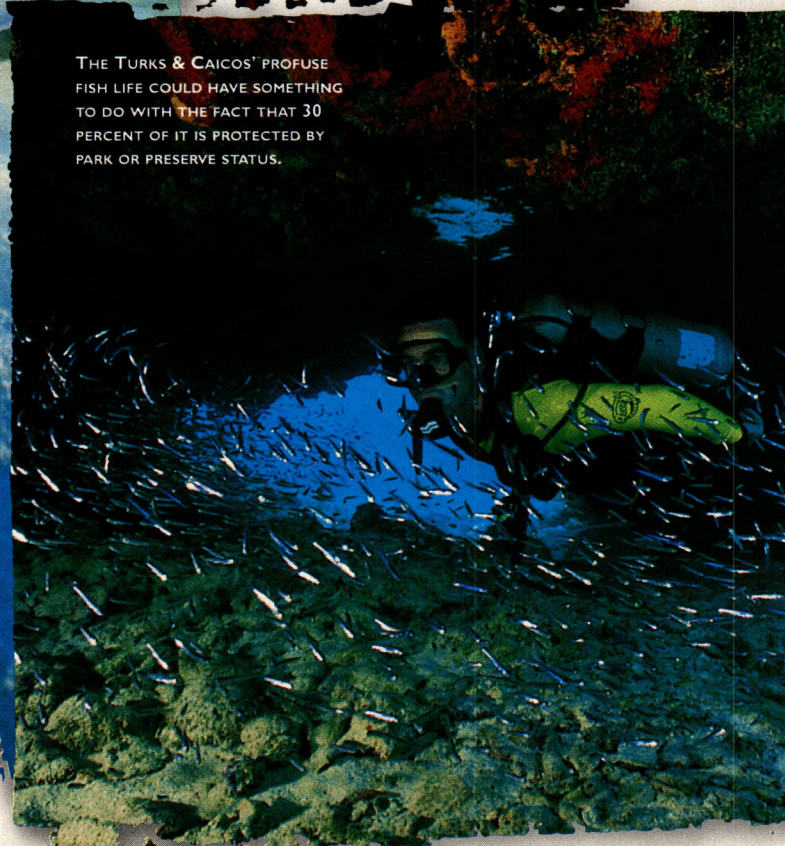
Caicos Islands

The crown colony's name owes itself to the two small and distinct chains of pale limestone stretching across an unforgettably turquoise sea. The tiny Turks Islands in the east are dwarfed by the relatively enormous Caicos Islands in the west and separated by the 7,000-foot-deep Turks Island Passage.

Providenciales is the transportation hub and tourism epicenter; it's also the closest you'll get to a cosmopolitan atmosphere. It has the largest concentration of resorts, restaurants and dive operations in the islands, all concentrated in the Turtle Cove area and sprinkled along the coast toward Grace Bay.

West Caicos is the Caicos' only uninhabited cay, an important salt and sisal center and, after Provo, perhaps the second most-dived island in the country. Little Water Cay is a sanctuary for Turks & Caicos rock iguanas, and there are old cannons just under the water's surface at Fort George Cay. Caves pockmark the landscape at Middle Caicos, the largest island in the Turks & Caicos. Flamingos flock to North Caicos, the greenest of all the isles, and divers are flocking in increasing numbers to South Caicos, on the edge of the Turks Island Passage.

There are also several small wrinkles of dry earth that form a lip on the sandy plain of the Caicos Bank. On one side is French Cay, which served as a hideout for pirates and is now a bird sanctuary. On the



THE TURKS & CAICOS' PROFUSE
FISH LIFE COULD HAVE SOMETHING
TO DO WITH THE FACT THAT 30
PERCENT OF IT IS PROTECTED BY
PARK OR PRESERVE STATUS.

other side are the Ambergis Cays, an important 19th-century whaling center. In between lies the Molasses Reef Wreck, believed to be the oldest wreck in the Western Hemisphere.

The Diving

Depending on conditions, Provo-based dive boats leave from one of three marinas: Turtle Cove, the one at Sapodilla Bay or the one near Five Cays. All operators will meet you at their headquarters or pick you up from your hotel and take you to their boat.

These operators conduct a majority of their dives off West Caicos and Northwest Point—the two most popular diving areas; you might visit Pine Cay or French Cay at least once during a week-long stay. Weather permitting, urge them to take you to French Cay, 15 miles due south of Provo. It's a long ride but well worth the trip.

Marine Environment

What can you say about a place where 30 percent of land and water is protected by park or preserve status? While they fall short of guaranteeing it, the folks at Art Pickering's say that if you stay on Provo for a week in February or March, chances are pretty good you will see a humpback whale. Chances are even better of seeing JoJo, the resident bottlenosed dolphin, who escorts boats to dive sites, and will occasionally snorkel with you at Smith's Reef. Odds are stacked in your favor for spotting eagle rays, and stingrays are not at all uncommon.

Diversions

One word: beaches. Sources say there's 230 miles of 'em in this crown colony, much of that on Provo. Why do you think they built all those resorts? There's an 18-hole golf course here, too. Make sure



DIVE IN



Climate

All of the islands are bone-dry, with temperatures ranging from the 80Fs to the 90Fs during the day in summer, and 65F to 80F at night. Winter temps range from 70F to 80F during the day; 55F to 70F at night.



Water Temperature

Water temps range from 75F in winter (you'll want a shorty at the very least) to 85F in summer (swim trunks or skin only). You can thank the pestilent stinging thimble jellyfish for the need to wear extra protection such as a lycra hood from late March to early April.



Visibility & Conditions

From May to September you'll find the calmest conditions and best visibility. Late summer to early fall is especially good for visibility, which sometimes approaches 200 feet. Sponges spawn in late March and early April, reducing vis in places to 50 feet. On average, vis ranges from 50 feet to 150 feet at West Caicos sites and Northwest Point, 100 to 150 at French Cay, and 50 to 150 at Grand Turk.



Money Matters

The U.S. dollar is the currency of choice on all islands. Despite the Turks & Caicos' reputation as an offshore banking center, you'll find only one automated teller machine in downtown Provo. Credit cards are widely accepted, including Visa, MasterCard and American Express, but you should bring enough cash for incidentals.

Never leave cash in your room, especially on Grand Turk. Use the hotel safe or keep it on you—thieves prefer cash to Nikons and Nikes.



Coming & Going

Proof of citizenship—a passport or birth certificate—is required to enter the islands. On the way out, a \$15 tax is levied on everybody older than 12.



Electricity

110 volts, 60 cycles; same as the U.S. and Canada.



Calling Home

Cable & Wireless handles all long-distance. You can reach an operator to make a credit or calling card call by dialing 111. The area code for the Turks & Caicos changed from 809 to 649 on June 1, though you can use 809 until May 1998.



Water Supply

The water is generally safe on Provo and Grand Turk. Finicky drinkers may

want to buy bottled water. In this dry climate, many islands endure constant water shortages. Please use it sparingly.



Getting There and Around

American Airlines offers two daily flights between Miami and Providenciales. Lynx Airways links Fort Lauderdale, Fla., and Grand Turk three times a week. Puddle-jumpers, including SkyKing Airways, Turks & Caicos Airways and Interisland Airways, connect Provo, Grand Turk, Salt Cay and South Caicos.

Left is right and right is wrong: Drive on the left. A valid U.S. or Canadian license is required. You'll want a rental car on Provo, as hotels and restaurants are clustered in different areas; a scooter will suffice on Grand Turk.



Packing Tips

It's always a good idea to bring a light sweater or windbreaker, even in summer. The boat ride from afternoon dives and whale watching expeditions can get a little breezy. While shorts and T-shirts are OK for much of the Turks & Caicos, some upscale restaurants on Provo frown upon anything less than slacks or nice shorts and a collared shirt. Comfortable casual is the norm on Grand Turk.



Time Zone

Eastern Standard Time. The islands don't observe Daylight Savings Time.



For More Info

Birnbaum's Bahamas and Turks & Caicos guidebook is about as comprehensive as you'll find at the bookstore. It has two whole chapters devoted to the islands (hey, it's better than nothing). Pisces Books' *Diving and Snorkeling Guide to the Turks & Caicos Islands* is good for dive-site info. Once you get there, free "Where, When, How" guides to Provo and Grand Turk—available at most hotels—are ideal for making restaurant selections and giving you ideas about what to do when you're not blowing bubbles.



SPONGES ARE ONE OF THE STAR
ATTRactions ON GRAND TURK'S
WALLS.

you call in your tee time well in advance. There are nature trails on Little Water Cay, and many dive operators will take landlubbing couples to secluded island beaches for an hour-long picnic or a whole-day getaway.

Accommodations

Variety is Provo's strongest suit. There's the Erebus Inn overlooking Turtle Cove, elegant Grace Bay Club, modern Turquoise Reef, upscale Ocean Club, gregarious Club Med Turkoise, all-inclusive Sandals Turks & Caicos, pink-painted Le Deck Beach Club and waterfront Turtle

Cove Inn.

There's Eagle's Rest Villas and a couple of guesthouses on Middle Caicos, and three inns on North Caicos. You have only one choice on South Caicos, the 24-unit dive resort Club Caribe.

Restaurants

For its size, Provo has an excellent selection. **UPSCALE:** The Terrace, located at Turtle Cove, is perhaps Provo's most highly recommended establishment; the Caicos Café's French owners give it a funky Euro-Caribbean feel; and Bella Luna pumps out some mean (Continued on page 115)

DIVE SITES

Caicos Islands

Amphitheater, Northwest Point, Providenciales

Depth ▶ 130 feet max. **Skill** ▶ Novice to intermediate. **Count on** ▶ Tons of fish, including horse-eye jacks and black durgons, on a spur-and-groove reef. A wall convoluted with buttresses and undercuts and covered with red and yellow encrusting sponges and black coral. **If you're lucky** ▶ You'll see an eagle ray fly over the enormous orange elephant ear sponge at 85 feet.

Coral Stairway, Northwest Point, Providenciales

Depth ▶ 130 feet max. **Skill** ▶ Novice. **Count on** ▶ A patch reef that gently tumbles to a sheer wall, armored in plate corals and hazed by clouds of garden-variety tropical fish. **If you're lucky** ▶ You'll see spotted eagle rays, Atlantic spadefish and lobsters.

Dax Canyon, Off French Cay

Depth ▶ 130 feet max. **Skill** ▶ Intermediate to advanced. **Count on** ▶ A dramatic wall brimming with tube sponges and waving soft corals, bushes of black coral and grotesque elephant ear sponges. Mackerel, horse-eye jacks and barracuda look for trouble over the drop-off. **If you're lucky** ▶ You'll see a lone reef shark cruising the wall, or better yet, a whale shark.

Elephant Ear Canyon, West Caicos

Depth ▶ 130 feet max. **Skill** ▶ Intermediate. **Count on** ▶ You guessed it—the largest elephant ear sponge yet discovered in the Turks & Caicos, measuring 10-and-a-half feet in diameter at 95 feet. A sandy plain under the boat tended by stingrays and margate, with the wall starting at 60 feet. **If you're lucky** ▶ You won't kick any harmful sand onto the sponge.

French Cay Shallows, French Cay

Depth ▶ 20 feet max. **Skill** ▶ Novice. **Count on** ▶ A rainbow-hued reef with beautiful stands of elkhorn coral. The reef is raked by swim-throughs and ledges blurred by silversides, and lobster cram every nook and cranny. This is a great place to snorkel during your surface interval. **If you're lucky** ▶ You'll see a snoozing nurse shark or an eagle ray.

Grundy's Grotto, West Caicos

Depth ▶ 130 feet max. **Skill** ▶ Novice. **Count on** ▶ A huge sandy plain, swept by stingrays and interrupted by small coral heads that get bigger toward the lip of the wall, where you're sure to find clouds of chromis and grunts. **If you're lucky** ▶ A turtle or two, or a school of jacks.

G-Spot, French Cay

Depth ▶ 130 feet max. **Skill** ▶ Intermediate to advanced. **Count on** ▶ An incredible wall and the feeling that anything could happen, any time. Enormous tube and elephant

ear sponges and black coral wisps hanging off an almost vertical wall. **If you're lucky** You'll see a reef shark or two.

Highway to Heaven, West Caicos

Depth 130 feet max. **Skill** Novice to intermediate. **Count on** A shallow or deep dive, with stingrays and huge schools of jacks in the shallows, and swim-throughs and coral archways below 80 feet. **If you're lucky** You'll see a blacktip shark cruising the depths.

Pine Cay, East of Provo

Depth 130 feet max. **Skill** Intermediate. **Count on** Underwater seamounts that drop down to a deep plateau at 150 feet. There are actually two sites here, Football Field and Eagle Ray Pass. **If you're lucky** You may get an encounter with dolphins, or sight a whale.

Shark Hotel, West Caicos

Depth 130 feet max. **Skill** Novice or advanced. **Count on** A great shallow and deep dive. Shallow, you'll find columns of pillar coral tended by queen angelfish and small tropicals. Huge schools of jack—I counted at least 100—hang just below the surface. If you want to dive deep, the wall starts in 50 feet of water, and drops straight down to a chimney that starts at 100 and lets you out at 130. **If you're lucky** As the name suggests, reef and blacktip sharks.

Smith's Reef, Turtle Cove, Providenciales

Depth 20 feet. **Skill** Novice to intermediate. **Count on** Provo's best shore dive. The occasional turtle and schools of curious barracuda. Interesting patch reef formations, with gardens of flowering anemones. **If you're lucky** A rendezvous with JoJo, the friendly neighborhood dolphin.

South Caicos, Eastern Caicos Islands

Depth 130 feet max. **Skill** Novice through advanced. **Count on** Some of the most pristine wall diving in the Caicos Islands. Dive sites include Amos's Wall, Eagle's Nest and The Arch. **If you're lucky** You can find an operator who'll take you there from Provo or Grand Turk, or stay there at the Club Caribe. Chances are better here of seeing the pelagics: spotted eagles, sharks, loggerhead turtles.

Sponge Gallery, West Caicos

Depth 130 feet max. **Skill** Novice. **Count on** A dramatic wall starting at 50 feet, dropping off to the undiveable 6,000-foot abyss. Expect grouper, grunts, jacks, barracuda, mackerel, stingrays and—you guessed it—sponges, and lots of them. Just below the mooring is a sandy plain with scattered coral heads. **If you're lucky** Turtles, eagle rays, sharks.

Turks Islands

Coral Gardens, Grand Turk

Depth 70 feet. **Skill** Novice. **Count on** Beautiful canyons, a big drop-off and lots of undulating soft corals. This site is a favorite of Cecil Ingham, owner of Sea Eye Diving. The grouper flock to him like reunited siblings on "The Jenny Jones Show." **If you're lucky** The grouper will warm up to you.

Gibbs Cay, Due south of Grand Turk

Depth 3 feet (snorkel). **Skill** Novice. **Count on** A squadron of stingrays big and small in shallow water, all looking for chum handouts. The feeling you're witnessing the start of another Stingray City. Grand Turk operators bring divers here for surface intervals and picnics. No wonder—it has a wonderful beach, and a hike up the island's hill com-

mands a great view of Grand Turk, Salt Cay and the wide-open Atlantic. **If you're lucky** You can catch this attraction before it gets too popular.

HMS Endymion, South of Great Sand Cay

Depth 15 to 30 feet. **Skill** Intermediate. **Count on** One of the most picturesque shallow wreck dives in the Caribbean region. This 140-foot wooden-hulled British warship lies about 30 miles south of Grand Turk in a breezy underwater current. Cannons, ballast, anchors and bronze pins are strewn about like military surplus. **If you're lucky** You'll see a humpback or two on the boat ride out and a shy nurse shark once you get there.

Humpback Encounter, South of Great Sand Cay

Depth 0 to your breath-hold limit. **Skill** Intermediate to advanced. **Season** Dec. through April. **Count on** While not officially a dive or a dive site, this just may be your most memorable wet time in the islands. Between December and April, the waters south of Salt Cay are a busy thoroughfare for migrating humpbacks that do their duty at the Silver Banks north of Hispaniola. Some operators (Oasis Divers and Salt Cay Divers to name two) will bring you here to look for breaches. If the whales are feeling sociable, you can quietly roll into the water with mask, fins and snorkel for a once-in-a-lifetime encounter with these bus-sized mammals. **If you're lucky** You'll see more than two. And if you're really lucky and swim with them, you just might see God.

Kelly's Folly, Salt Cay

Depth 100 feet max. **Skill** Novice. **Count on** A gradually sloping wall accented by pillar coral and gorgonians and starts in 30 feet of water at the island's southern tip. Gaggles of grouper and grunts. Perhaps Salt Cay's most popular dive site. **If you're lucky** You'll see a turtle, moray or nurse shark.

McDonald's, Grand Turk

Depth 130 feet max. **Skill** Novice to intermediate. **Count on** No golden arches, just one made of coral and covered with a thick coat of macro critters. Big groupers looking for some fast food. Swim through the arch and you're out on the sponge-splattered wall at 70 feet. **If you're lucky** This will remain Grand Turk's only McDonald's.

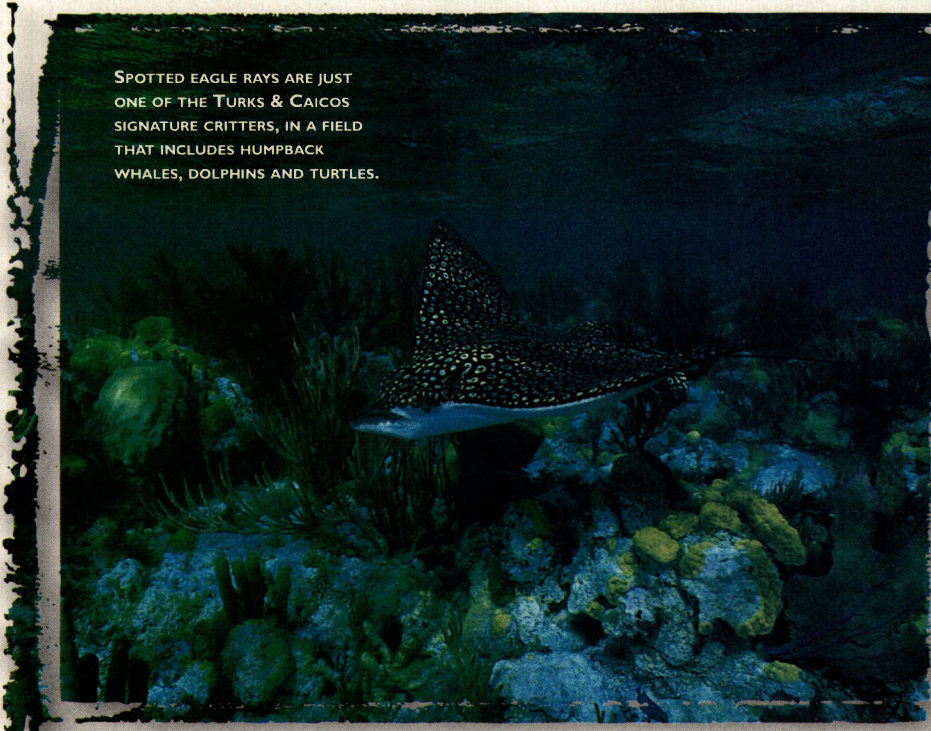
Point Pleasant, Salt Cay

Depth 15 feet. **Skill** Novice. **Count on** A long shallow dive or snorkel. A ton of ambient light reveals startling hues in this elkhorn coral garden, occupied by blue tang, stoplight parrotfish and French angels. **If you're lucky** You'll see eagle rays or tarpon.

Tunnels, Grand Turk

Depth 130 feet max. **Skill** Novice to intermediate. **Count on** Coral arches that lead divers from the sandy flats directly out to the sheer wall face. Keep a mask peeled for stingrays, flying gurnards and peacock flounder in the sand. **If you're lucky** You'll be in the only boat on this popular dive site. And if you're real lucky, you just might see a manta or two.

SPOTTED EAGLE RAYS ARE JUST ONE OF THE TURKS & CAICOS SIGNATURE CRITTERS, IN A FIELD THAT INCLUDES HUMPBAC WHALES, DOLPHINS AND TURTLES.



TURKS & CAICOS ADVERTISER DIRECTORY

Operators and Resorts

Art Pickering's Provo Turtle Divers (Providenciales)

(800) 833-1341, (809) 946-4232; fax (809) 941-5296 • Dives French Cay, Pine Cay, Grace Bay, Northwest Point, South West Reef, West Caicos. Oldest and most experienced operator in the Turks & Caicos. Best packages: 7 nights/6 days at the Erebus Inn, 6 days of diving, \$674; 7 nights/6 days at Turtle Cove Inn, 6 days of diving, \$672.

Caicos Adventures Diving (Providenciales)

(800) 513-5822, (809) 941-3346 phone/fax, • Dives West Caicos, French Cay, sometimes Northwest Point, Grace Bay, Pine Cay, North Caicos. West Caicos is our specialty. Buffet lunch during the interval. Uncharted sites. Tax and transfer included. We treat people the best. Best package: Hotel/dive packages start as low as \$456, lunch included.

Cecil Ingham's Sea Eye Diving (Grand Turk)

(800) 810-3483, (809) 946-1407; fax (809) 946-1407 • Dives Grand Turk Wall. Full-service PADI and NAUI shop. Courses up to instructor level. Gibbs Cay Adventure Excursions. E-6 processing and underwater photo rentals. 35 years combined experience! Best Package: From \$324 per person, dbl. occ. to \$480 per person, dbl. occ. Includes 4 nights/3 days of diving, unlimited beach diving, tax, airport transfers.

Club Carib Beach & Harbour Resorts (South Caicos)

(800) 581-2582, (305) 258-1177; fax (305) 257-2072 • Dives South Caicos, Long Cay. We take you to see unusually large marine life, including spotted eagle rays. In-house dive shop. Packages include three full meals everyday, three dives daily, and double occupancy accommodations.

Dive Provo/Turquoise Reef Resort & Casino (Providenciales)

(800) 234-7768, (809) 946-5029; fax (809) 946-5936 • Dives West Caicos,

Northwest Point, French Cay, Grace Bay, Pine Cay. You name it, we dive it! Customer service, full gear handling, rinsing and storage. All-day "scuba safaris" to remote reefs and walls. Best package: 8 days/7 nights, 6 days diving, \$731.

Flamingo Divers (Providenciales)

(800) 204-9282, (809) 946-4193; fax (809) 946-4193 • Dives West Caicos, Northwest Point, French Cay. We are small, friendly and very knowledgeable about the area. We take out small groups on fast boats. No schedule—we dive the best spots! Best package: 6 nights at the Erebus Inn, two-tank dives daily, \$557.22 (summer).

Oasis Divers (Grand Turk)

(800) 892-3995; (809) 946-1128; fax (809) 946-1128 • Dives Grand Turk Wall, Salt Cay Wall, Sand Cay Wall. Complete gear handling and set-up. Towels and drinks provided on board for all guests. Superior guest services. E-6 processing. PADI instruction. Whale watching trips. Complete accommodations and dive packages available. Best package: \$665 dive package, includes diving, 7 nights beachfront accommodations and breakfast daily. Call for latest specials.

Salt Cay Divers (Salt Cay)

(888) 725-8229, (809) 946-6906; fax (809) 946-6922 • Dives both Salt Cay and Grand Turk Walls, world-class *Endymion* wreck. Very personalized, customer-driven PADI divemasters in remote, pristine environment. • Best packages: 7 nights/8 days at Mt. Pleasant Guest House, three gourmet meals, three boat dives daily, unlimited shore diving. 7 nights/8 days at Castaways Beach House, full kitchens, bedroom, three boat dives daily, unlimited shore diving. \$695 (April-Oct.); \$795 (Nov.-March) per person.

Sandals/Beaches Turks & Caicos (Providenciales)

(800) 241-0824, (800) BEACHES, (809) 946-8000; fax (809) 946-8001 • Last of the true exotics, Turks & Caicos is just an hour from Miami. Come to this magical piece of heaven and discover your senses and rediscover yourself. Pristine and uncongested, this is an oasis

of tranquility and serenity. Call (800) 241-0824.

Turtle In Divers (Providenciales)

(800) 359-3483, (809) 941-5389; fax (815) 623-6574 • Dives Providenciales area, including West Caicos, North West Point, Pine Cay area and French Cay. We take out small groups on a large boat.

Live-aboards

Aggressor Fleet/Turks & Caicos Aggressor

(800) 348-2628, (504) 385-2628; fax (504) 384-0817 • Dives West Caicos, French Cay/Provo, South Caicos. Unlimited diving aboard a quality live-aboard with friendliest crew. Whale charters from mid-January to mid-April.

Peter Hughes/Sea Dancer

(800) 9-DANCER (800-932-6237), (305) 669-9391; fax (305) 669-9475 • Dives West Caicos, Provo's North Wall and French Cay or South Caicos and Grand Turk. Setting the world standard for dive adventure. Best package: 7 nights on a share basis, \$999 all-inclusive.

Tourism

Turks & Caicos Tourist Board

(800) 241-0824, (809) 946-2321 • Internet: <http://www.ttc.co.uk/t&c> • For more information on the beautiful Turks & Caicos Islands, please call us or visit our web site.

Photo Competition

First World Open Underwater Photographic Competition

Another great reason to visit the Turks & Caicos Islands this year! Competitors from around the world have already signed up to enter this unique competition! The prize—your photograph published as a commemorative postage stamp from the TCI Government. For information: <http://www.underwaterphoto.com>; e-mail ldmintl@aol.com; or call IDM International at (412) 487-1375.

READER RATINGS



MARK LAWRENCE

Cozumel is no longer the secret gem of Caribbean diving.

According to our records, more of our readers visited Cozumel than any other international dive spot last year. In fact, almost 16 percent of survey respondents chose Mexico's divers' island as the destination for their last dive vacation.

We know high-voltage drift diving in the electric blue current off the Yucatan Peninsula is what attracts divers. But is there something else that draws them back to the island year after year?

Cozumel is extremely popular with experienced divers, as evidenced by its top

scores in photography and advanced diving. Could the fish life also have something to do with it? Possibly, since Cozumel received an A-minus in that category. Health of reefs helps too—with an A-minus, they're among the Caribbean's liveliest. High scores for quality of wall diving and snorkeling don't hurt, either.

But the key to Cozumel's magnetism may lie in its grade-A value. Shop around and you can find packages including accommodations, diving and airfare that are cheaper than packages to other destinations that don't include the airfare. Divers may not be able to keep secrets, but they'll never pass up a good bargain.

Cozumel, Mexico

Dive Operators

Overall :	B
Staff :	B+
Boat & Facilities:	B-
Value :	A-

Aqua Safari

Ave. Rafael E. Melgar, Cozumel, Quintana Roo, Mexico 77600
Tel: (011) 52-987-20101
Fax: (011) 52-987-20661
e-mail: dive@aquasafari.com
Web: www.aquasafari.com

Boat length/max. number of divers: 38'/24, 38'/18, (2) 35'/12, 28'/10, 25'/8. **Morning tanks/times/price:** 2/8:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m./\$50-\$55. **Afternoon tanks/times/price:** 1 or 2/1:30 p.m.-5:30 p.m./\$25 or \$55. **Night dives:** Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday. **E-6 processing:** No. **Certifying agencies:** PADI. **Primary resort affiliation:** Safari Inn/Plaza Las Glorias. **Resort on-site:** Yes.

Reader comments ▶ *Extremely accommodating ... Very good choice ... The staff is like an extended family ... Safety is highest priority, which we appreciate ... We arrived for the day on a cruise ship and we were met at the pier by the staff; they carried our gear to the dive shop ... The captain is extremely cautious and safety-conscious.*

Overall :	B-
Staff :	A-
Boat & Facilities:	C-
Value :	A-

Black Shark Dive Shop

Cozumel, Quintana Roo, Mexico 77600
Tel: (011) 52-987-25657
Fax: (011) 52-987-20396
e-mail: infotus@cozumet.finred.com.mx
Web: www.exposeonline

Boat length/max. number of divers: 30'/12-14, (2) 28'/6-7, 28'/7-8. **Morning tanks/times/price:** 2/9 a.m.-1:30 p.m./\$45-\$55. **Afternoon tanks/times/price:** 2/1 p.m.-5 p.m./\$45-\$55. **Night dives:** Monday-Sunday. **E-6 processing:** PADI, NAUI. **Certifying agencies:** No.

Reader comments ▶ *Excellent dive sites and divemasters ... The boats were small, allowing more personal attention ... Excellent knowledge of the reefs and marine life ... Very personal service.*

Overall :	B-
Staff :	A-
Boat & Facilities:	C-
Value :	A-

Blue Bubble Divers

5th Ave. South, Cozumel, Quintana Roo, Mexico 77600
Tel: (800) 878-8853, (011) 52-987-21865
Fax: (011) 52-987-21865
e-mail: bubbles@cozumet.finred.com.mx
Web: www.gssolutions.com/bluebubble

Boat length/max. number of divers: (2) 30'/8, (3) 27'/6. **Morning tanks/times/price:** 2/8:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m./\$50. **Afternoon tanks/times/price:** 2/1:30 p.m.-5 p.m./\$50. **Night dives:** Monday-Saturday. **E-6 processing:** No. **Certifying agencies:** PADI. **Primary resort affiliation:** Bahia/Fiesta Inn. **Resort on-site:** No.

Reader comments ▶ *Fast boats and on-time departures ... Great no-frills place ... Small groups on boats ... Top-notch bunch ... Staff is friendly and helpful without being restrictive ... Great for experienced divers ... Boats are roomy and fast.*

Overall :	B
Staff :	A-
Boat & Facilities:	C+
Value :	B+

Caribbean Divers

Box 191, Cozumel, Quintana Roo, Mexico 77600
Tel: (800) 874-7312, (011) 52-987-21080
Fax: (011) 52-987-21426
e-mail: caridive@cozumel.czm.com.mx
Web: www.cozumel.net/caribbeandivers

Boat length/max. number of divers: 40'/14, 38'/12, (2) 27'/8. **Morning tanks/times/price:** 2/8:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m./\$50. **Afternoon tanks/times/price:** 2/1 p.m.-5 p.m./\$50. **Night dives:** Tuesday-Saturday. **E-6 processing:** No. **Certifying agencies:** NAUI, PADI, PDIC, CMAS. **Primary resort affiliation:** Bahia and Colonial. **Resort on-site:** No.

Reader comments ▶ *Dive instructors were excellent, friendly and knowledgeable ... Picked us up at our hotel each morning ... Divemasters have a "back of their hand" knowledge of Cozumel's reefs.*

Overall :	C+
Staff :	B
Boat & Facilities:	C
Value :	B

Del Mar Aquatics

Costera Sur Km. 4, Cozumel, Quintana Roo, Mexico 77600
Tel: (800) 435-3240, (011) 52-987-21665
Fax: (011) 52-987-21833
e-mail: delmar@cozumel.com

Boat length/max. number of divers: 45'/25-32, 31'/10-12, (4) 28'/14-16. **Morning tanks/times/price:** 2/8:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m./\$50. **Afternoon tanks/times/price:** 2/1 p.m.-4 p.m./\$50. **Night dives:** Monday-Sunday. **E-6 processing:** Yes. **Certifying agencies:** CMAS, NAUI, PADI, SSI, PDIC, YMCA. **Primary resort affiliation:** Hotel Casa Del Mar. **Resort on-site:** Yes.

Reader comments ▶ *Fast boats ... Many divers on board ... Great service ... Took a long time to get full tanks.*

Overall :	B+
Staff :	A-
Boat & Facilities:	B
Value :	A

Dive House

Main Plaza, P.O. Box 246, Cozumel, Quintana Roo, Mexico 77600
Tel: (011) 52-987-21953
Fax: (011) 52-987-23068
e-mail: dive@divehouse.com

Boat length/max. number of divers: 46'/12, 42'/12, 35'/10, (2) 30'/6-10. **Morning tanks/times:** 2/8:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. **Afternoon tanks/times:** 2/1:30 p.m.-5 p.m. **Night dives:** Monday, Wednesday, Friday. **E-6 processing:** No. **Certifying agencies:** NAUI, PADI, SSI. **Primary resort affiliation:** Fiesta Americana Cozumel Reef Hotel. **Resort on-site:** Yes.

Reader comments ▶ *Very accommodating ... Nice boats and friendly people ... Sometimes crowded in the water ... Professional staff ... Dive shop was nice, pool and bar outstanding.*

Overall :	B
Staff :	B+
Boat & Facilities:	B-
Value :	A-

Dive Palancar

Carretera Chankanaab, Km. 16.5, Cozumel, Quintana Roo, Mexico 77600
Tel: (800) 433-0885, (011) 52-987-25094
e-mail: divepal@dsi-divetours.com
Web: www.dsi-divetours.com/divepal

Boat length/max. number of divers: 42'/16, (2) 32'/12, (2) 28'/8, 26'/6. **Morning tanks/times/price:** 1/9 a.m.-10:15 a.m./\$29, 1/10:30 a.m.-11:45 a.m./\$29. **Afternoon tanks/times/price:** 1/2 p.m.-3:15 p.m./\$29, 1/3:30 p.m.-4:45 p.m./\$29. **Night dives:** Tuesday, Thursday. **E-6 processing:** No. **Certifying agencies:** PADI, NAUI, SSI. **Primary resort affiliation:** Allegro Diamond Resorts. **Resort on-site:** Yes.

Reader comments ▶ *Operation has improved greatly ... Made an attempt to honor all special requests ... The staff, divemasters and facilities are excellent.*

Overall :	B-
Staff :	B+
Boat & Facilities:	C
Value :	B+

Dive Paradise

601 Melgar, Cozumel, Quintana Roo, Mexico 77600
Tel: (800) 308-5125, (011) 52-987-21007
Fax: (011) 52-987-21061
e-mail: appledp@cozumel.czm.com.mx
Web: www.dparadise.com

Boat length/max. number of divers: 48'/28, 46'/24, 44'/24, 42'/20, 40'/20, 36'/16. **Morning tanks/times/price:** 2/8:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m./\$51-\$54. **Afternoon tanks/times/price:** 2/1 p.m.-5 p.m./\$47. **Night dives:** Monday-Sunday. **E-6 processing:** No. **Certifying agencies:** CMAS, IDEA, NAUI, PADI, PDIC, SSI, YMCA. **Primary resort affiliation:** Hotel Barracuda and Hotel Villa Blanca. **Resort on-site:** No.

Reader comments ▶ *They were very good ... A well-run organization.*

Overall :	C+
Staff :	A-
Boat & Facilities:	C
Value :	B+

Marine Sports

P.O. Box 379, Cozumel, Quintana Roo, Mexico 77600
Tel: (800) FIESTA-1
 (011) 52-987-25062/22900
Fax: (011) 52-987-22154

Boat length/max. number of divers: 35'/14, 33'/14, 28'/8, 26'/7. **Morning tanks/times/price:** 2/9 a.m.-1 p.m./\$50. **Afternoon tanks/times/price:** 2/1:30 p.m.-5 p.m./\$50. **Night dives:** Monday-Saturday. **E-6 processing:** No. **Certifying agencies:** ACUC, PADI. **Primary resort affiliation:** Fiesta Inn Cozumel. **Resort on-site:** Yes.

Reader comments ▶ *Impressive ... Dive quality enhanced by limited dive groups ... Very safety-conscious.*

Overall :	B+
Staff :	B+
Boat & Facilities:	B
Value :	A

Scuba Cozumel

P.O. Box 289, Cozumel, Quintana Roo, Mexico 77600
Tel: (800) 847-5708
 (011) 52-987-20627/20853
Fax: (011) 52-987-21977

Boat length/max. number of divers: 53'/24, (3) 43'/24, (4) 33'/12. **Morning tanks/times/price:** 2/8:30 a.m.-1 p.m./\$45. **Afternoon tanks/times/price:** 1/3 p.m.-4:30 p.m./\$25. **Night dives:** Monday, Wednesday, Friday. **E-6 processing:** No. **Certifying agencies:** NAUI, PADI. **Primary resort affiliation:** Scuba Club Galapago.

Resort on-site: Yes.

Reader comments ▶ *An outstanding operation.*

Overall :	B+
Staff :	A-
Boat & Facilities:	B
Value :	A

Scuba Du

P.O. Box 137, Cozumel, Quintana Roo, Mexico 77600
Tel: (011) 52-987-20322, ext. 4109
Fax: (011) 52-987-24130
e-mail: scubadu@cozumel.czm.com.mx
Web: www.cozumel.net/diving/scubadu

Boat length/max. number of divers: (2) 37'/12, 33'/10, (2) 28'/6. **Morning tanks/times/price:** 2/8:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m./\$55. **Afternoon tanks/times/price:** 2/1:30 p.m.-5:30 p.m./\$55. **Night dives:** Depends on interest. **E-6 processing:** No. **Certifying agencies:** NAUI, PADI. **Primary resort affiliation:** Hotel Presidente Inter-Continental. **Resort on-site:** Yes.

Reader comments ▶ *The people are wonderful, helpful and take the time to listen to you ... The staff is so nice.*

Overall :	B
Staff :	B+
Boat & Facilities:	B-
Value :	A-

T.T.C. & Club Divers

Cozumel, Quintana Roo, Mexico 77600
Tel: (011) 52-987-24476
Fax: (011) 52-987-24476
e-mail: ttc@cozumel.czm.com.mx
Web: www.ttcdiving.com

Boat length/max. number of divers: 58'/30, (3) 46'/24, (2) 33'/12. **Morning tanks/times/price:** 2/8:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m./\$45. **Afternoon tanks/times/price:** 2/1:30 p.m.-5 p.m./\$45. **Night dives:** Monday-Sunday. **E-6 processing:** No. **Certifying agencies:** PADI. **Primary resort affiliation:** Club Cozumel Caribe. **Resort on-site:** Yes.

Reader comments ▶ *Great facility.*

Accommodations

Overall :	B-
Service :	B-
Restaurant:	B-
Facilities:	B-
Value :	B

Casa del Mar

Cozumel, Quintana Roo, Mexico 77600
Tel: (800) 435-3240, (011) 52-987-21900
Fax: (011) 52-987-21855
e-mail: cozumel@cozumel.czm.com.mx

Price of double for one night: \$75. **Number of rooms:** 106. **Restaurant on premises:** Yes. **Scheduled activities for kids:** No. **Babysitting:** Yes. **Beachfront property:** Yes. **Rooms have phones:** Yes. **Air-conditioning:** Yes. **Credit cards accepted:** Visa, MasterCard, AmEx. **Dive operation on premises:** Del Mar Aquatics.

Reader comments ▶ *Clean towels were rare.*

Overall :	B+
Service :	A-
Restaurant:	B+
Facilities:	A-
Value :	A-

Club Cozumel Caribe

Cozumel, Quintana Roo, Mexico 77600
Tel: (011) 52-987-20100/20021
Fax: (011) 52-987-20288

Price of double for one night: \$79 to \$99, all-inclusive. **Number of rooms:** 200. **Restaurant on premises:** Yes. **Scheduled activities for kids:** Yes. **Babysitting:** Yes. **Beachfront property:** Yes. **Rooms have phones:** No. **Air-conditioning:** Yes. **Credit cards accepted:** Visa, MasterCard, AmEx. **Dive operation on premises:** T.T.C. Club Divers.

Reader comments ▶ *A great place to stay and dive ... Super hospitality ... Very good night snorkeling off the pier.*

Overall :	A-
Service :	A-
Restaurant:	A-
Facilities:	B+
Value :	A-

Coral Princess Hotel & Resort

Cozumel, Quintana Roo, Mexico 77600
Tel: (800) 253-2702, (011) 52-987-23200
Fax: (011) 52-987-22800

Price of double for one night: \$92, plus tax. **Number of rooms:** 139. **Restaurant on premises:** Yes. **Scheduled activities for kids:** No. **Babysitting:** Yes. **Beachfront property:** Yes. **Rooms have phones:** Yes. **Air-conditioning:** Yes. **Credit cards accepted:** Visa, MasterCard, AmEx. **Dive operation on premises:** Mako Tours.

Reader comments ▶ *Luxurious ... Great value.*

Overall :	A-
Service :	A
Restaurant:	A
Facilities:	A
Value :	A

Diamond Resort

Cozumel, Quintana Roo, Mexico 77600
Tel: (011) 52-987-23443
e-mail: dcozumel@cozumel.czm.com.mx

Price of double for one night: \$130. **Number of rooms:** 300. **Restaurant on premises:** Yes. **Scheduled activities for kids:** Yes. **Babysitting:** Yes. **Beachfront property:** Yes. **Rooms have phones:** Yes. **Air-conditioning:** Yes. **Credit cards accepted:** Visa, MasterCard, AmEx. **Dive operation on premises:** Dive Palancar.

Reader comments ▶ *New management ... A first-class operation at an unbeatable price ... Excellent staff with great activities ... A first-class operation.*

Overall :	A-
Service :	A-
Restaurant:	B+
Facilities:	A-
Value :	A-

Fiesta Americana

Cozumel, Quintana Roo, Mexico 77600
Tel: (800) FIESTA-1, (011) 52-987-22622
e-mail: vcozumel@fiestaamericana.com

Price of double for one night: \$187. **Number of rooms:** 228. **Restaurant on premises:** Yes. **Scheduled activities for kids:** No. **Babysitting:** Yes. **Beachfront property:** Yes. **Rooms have phones:** Yes. **Air-conditioning:** Yes. **Credit cards accepted:** Visa, MasterCard, AmEx, Diner's Club. **Dive operation on premises:** Dive House.

Reader comments ▶ *Friendly people ... Price of food is unreasonable ... Well-maintained.*

Overall :	B+
Service :	B+
Restaurant:	B+
Facilities:	A-
Value :	A-

Fiesta Inn

Cozumel, Quintana Roo, Mexico 77600
Tel: (800) FIESTA-1, (011) 52-987-22899
Fax: (011) 52-987-22154

Price of double for one night: \$99 (includes breakfast), plus tax. **Number of rooms:** 180. **Restaurant on premises:** Yes. **Scheduled activities for kids:** No. **Babysitting:** Yes. **Beachfront property:** Yes. **Rooms have phones:** Yes. **Air-conditioning:** Yes. **Credit cards accepted:** Visa, MasterCard, AmEx. **Dive operation on premises:** Marine Sports.

Reader comments ▶ *Close to town but far enough away ... Rooms were kept very clean—we even had fresh flowers left for us daily ... Staff and accommodations were superior ... Staff was excellent in trying to meet our needs.*

Overall :	B-
Service :	B
Restaurant:	C+
Facilities:	D+
Value :	A-

Hotel Barracuda

Cozumel, Quintana Roo, Mexico 77600
Tel: (011) 52-987-20002
Fax: (011) 52-987-20884
e-mail: barracud@cozumel.rce.com.mx

Price of double for one night: \$79, plus tax. **Number of rooms:** 52. **Restaurant on premises:** Yes. **Scheduled activities for kids:** No. **Babysitting:** Yes. **Beachfront property:** Yes. **Rooms have phones:** Yes. **Air-conditioning:** Yes. **Credit cards accepted:** Visa, MasterCard, AmEx. **Dive operation on premises:** Dive Paradise.

Reader comments ▶ *A diver's hotel ... Economical, convenient, clean place with air-conditioning.*

Overall :	B
Service :	B
Restaurant:	B+
Facilities:	B
Value :	A-

La Ceiba Hotel

Cozumel, Quintana Roo, Mexico 77600
Tel: (011) 52-987-20844
Fax: (011) 52-987-20065
e-mail: laceiba@cozumel.coz.com.mx

Price of double for one night: \$95, plus tax. **Number of rooms:** 113. **Restaurant on premises:** Yes. **Scheduled activities for kids:** No. **Babysitting:** Yes. **Beachfront property:** Yes. **Rooms have phones:** Yes. **Air-conditioning:** Yes. **Credit cards accepted:** Visa, MasterCard, AmEx. **Dive operation on premises:** Del Mar Aquatics.

Reader comments ▶ *Everyone wanted to make our stay as enjoyable as they could ... For a nondiving spouse, La Ceiba has good snorkeling and is a reasonable distance from San Miguel so cruise ship crowds aren't much of a bother ... The facilities were good for an economical trip ... A good diver's hotel.*

Overall :	A-
Service :	A-
Restaurant:	A-
Facilities:	A
Value :	A-

Paradisus

Cozumel, Quintana Roo, Mexico 77600
Tel: (888) 341-5993, (011) 52-987-20411
Fax: (011) 52-987-21599
e-mail: paradisus@cozumel.czm.com.mx

Price of double for one night: \$125 per person (includes meals). **Number of rooms:** 154. **Restaurant on premises:** Yes. **Scheduled activities for kids:** Yes. **Babysitting:** Yes. **Beachfront property:** Yes. **Rooms have phones:** Yes. **Air-conditioning:** Yes. **Credit cards accepted:** Visa, MasterCard, AmEx. **Dive operation on premises:** Caribbean Divers.

Reader comments ► *First-rate in every regard.*

Overall :	B+
Service :	B+
Restaurant:	B
Facilities:	B+
Value :	A-

Plaza las Glorias

Cozumel, Quintana Roo,
Mexico 77600
Tel: (011) 52-987-22400
Fax: (011) 52-987-21937
e-mail: ipc@cozumel.czm.com.mx

Price of double for one night: \$142. **Number of rooms:** 168. **Restaurant on premises:** Yes. **Scheduled activities for kids:** No. **Babysitting:** Yes. **Rooms have phones:** Yes. **Air-conditioning:** Yes. **Credit cards accepted:** Visa, MasterCard, AmEx. **Dive operation on premises:** Aqua Safari.

Reader comments ► *An excellent facility ... Very comfortable ... Fine accommodations.*

Overall :	A
Service :	A-
Restaurant:	A+
Facilities:	A
Value :	A

Presidente Inter-Continental Cozumel

Cozumel, Quintana Roo,
Mexico 77600
Tel: (011) 52-987-20322
Fax: (011) 52-987-23186
e-mail: czmh@interconti.com

Price of double for one night: \$190 (includes diving and breakfast). **Number of rooms:** 253. **Restaurant on premises:** Yes. **Scheduled activities for kids:** No. **Babysitting:** Yes. **Beachfront property:** Yes. **Rooms have phones:** Yes. **Air-conditioning:** Yes. **Credit cards accepted:** Visa, MasterCard, AmEx. **Dive operation on premises:** Scuba Du.

Overall :	B+
Service :	B
Restaurant:	B+
Facilities:	B+
Value :	B

Safari Inn

Cozumel, Quintana Roo,
Mexico 77600
Tel: (011) 52-987-20101
Fax: (011) 52-987-20661
e-mail: dive@aquasafari.com

Price of double for one night: \$35, plus tax. **Number of rooms:** 12. **Restaurant on premises:** No. **Scheduled activities for kids:** No. **Babysitting:** No. **Beachfront property:** No. **Rooms have phones:** No. **Air-conditioning:** Yes. **Dive operation on premises:** Aqua Safari.

Overall :	A-
Service :	A-
Restaurant:	A-
Facilities:	B-
Value :	A

Scuba Club Galapago Inn

Cozumel, Quintana Roo,
Mexico 77600
Tel: (800) 847-5708
(011) 52-987-21118

Price of double for one night: Call for rates. **Number of rooms:** 55. **Restaurant on premises:** Yes.

Scheduled activities for kids: No. **Babysitting:** Yes. **Beachfront property:** Yes. **Rooms have phones:** No. **Air-conditioning:** Yes. **Dive operation on premises:** Scuba Cozumel.

Reader comments ► *The room had a great view but was basic ... A diver's hotel ... Fantastic ... Food was abundant and excellent ... Facility was clean ... Staff was respectful and helpful.*

The following dive operators did not receive enough responses for their scores to be included here:

AquaWorld Cozumel

Carretera Costera Sur, Playa Paraiso, Km. 3.7,
Cozumel, Q. Roo, Mexico 77600
Tel: (888) 266-9888, (011) 52-987-21210
Fax: (011) 52-987-21210
e-mail: aqwssc@cozumel.czm.com.mx

DIMI Educational Dive Center

Av. Rafael Melgar #45-B,
Cozumel, Q. Roo, Mexico 77600
Tel: (011) 52-987-22915
Fax: (011) 52-987-23964
e-mail: dimidive@cozumel.czm.com.mx

Diving Adventures

Calle 5 #2, Cozumel, Q. Roo, Mexico 77600
Tel: (888) 338-0388, (011) 52-987-23009
Fax: (011) 52-987-23009
e-mail: diventur@cozumel.czm.com.mx

Papa Hogs Scuba Emporium

Box 562, San Miguel,
Cozumel, Q. Roo, Mexico 77600
Tel: (800) 780-3949, (011) 52-987-21651
Fax: (011) 52-987-24465
e-mail: diving@papahogs.com

Studio Blue Cozumel Dive Center

A. Rosado Salas, No. 121, PO Box 473,
Cozumel, Q. Roo, Mexico 77600
Tel: (011) 52-987-24414
Fax: (011) 52-987-24330
e-mail: studioblue@cozunet.finred.com.mx

COZUMEL RATINGS

Fish Life	A-
Big Animals	C
Health of Reefs	A-
Quality of Walls	A-
Snorkeling	A-
Shore Diving	B
Photography	A
Beginner Diving	B+
Advanced Diving	A
Value	A
Overall	B+

DAN

DIVERS ALERT NETWORK

DAN's Diving Preferred Provider Network Pledges First-class Treatment

by Dick Clarke, President, National Baromedical Services

A new era of top-quality hyperbaric treatment for injured divers has arrived. At the leading edge of this new movement, Divers Alert Network (DAN) has demonstrated its ongoing commitment to bringing its members the best care for the best prices.

In partnership with National Baromedical Services (NBS), DAN has introduced a network of preferred treatment facilities and hyperbaric physicians who are working together to deliver the highest quality hyperbaric care to DAN members.

Called the Diving Preferred Provider Network (DPPN), this program is only for DAN members. As an integral part of Network guidelines, participating chambers must agree to employ minimum acceptable standards of knowledge, skill and technology. They must further agree to accept reasonable and customary payment for services rendered, and accept such reimbursement as payment in full.

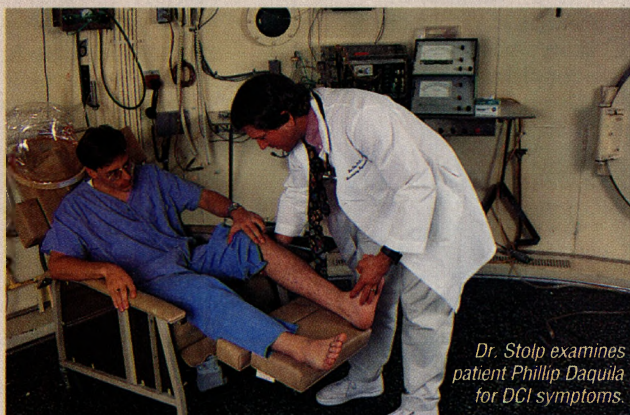
Why the Change?

Over the past three years, DAN members have become aware of DAN's increasing concern about hyperbaric care for its members—specifically, the quality of care provided to injured divers—and its range of costs, which, even with the same treatment schedules, have varied widely from chamber to chamber.

In his regular column in *Alert Diver*, DAN's bimonthly membership magazine, Executive Director Dr. Peter Bennett has written about questionable treatment practices and frequently exceeded "reasonable and customary" fee schedules on the part of some chambers treating not only DAN members, but divers all over the world.

To help establish an equilibrium in fluctuating quality and prices, DAN has contracted with NBS, a Columbia, S.C.-based company, to organize, implement and manage its hyperbaric treatment network. NBS is involved in all aspects of diving and hyperbaric medicine and technology, and provides expert assistance to hospitals planning the introduction of hyperbaric treatment facilities. NBS services include comprehensive program development, physician and staff training and continuing education, and billing and reimbursement support for all participating facilities.

If hyperbaric providers wish to give more than seven treatments, they are required to seek prior approval if DAN insurance benefits are to be maintained. DAN data show only 1 percent further recovery with more than seven treatments. "This policy pre-dates the DPPN by almost a year," says Dr.



Dr. Stolp examines patient Phillip Daquila for DCI symptoms.

DPPN Goals

- Improve continuing education at hyperbaric facilities
- Ensure minimum standards of practice and technology
- Reduce the time it takes to settle claims
- Improve hyperbaric treatment for divers
- Help keep insurance premiums down

The Network will not:

- Delay treatment in a diving emergency
- Increase costs to DAN members
- Deny injured divers necessary treatment
- Keep other non-DPPN facilities from treating DAN members

Bennett. "DAN had already asked that such precautions be taken. The DPPN is simply providing a mechanism for such a review, via an independent panel of experts." Thus far, only one case requesting more than seven treatments has been sent for referral, and it was approved.

The DPPN—Still the Same

Simply put, the Network's goal is to provide the best care possible to injured divers, keeping delays between symptom onset and hyperbaric treatment to an absolute minimum.

With the DPPN, DAN members requiring evaluation and possible hyperbaric therapy will still be referred to the nearest and most appropriate facility, regardless of whether that facility is in or out of the Network. Physician providers will still be responsible for medical decision-making and formulation of treatment plans. Nothing has changed in this respect—the DPPN is not an HMO.

Unlike HMO contracting, the DPPN is open to all hyperbaric facilities and their physicians. "We hope that all hyperbaric medicine programs will enroll," says Dr. Bennett. "And by doing so, they are committing to observing minimum training, continuing education requirements, and specific equipment standards."

The DPPN has incorporated a fee schedule consistent with health care reimbursement in the 1990s.

With the DPPN, however, contracted rates are well within the range of charges presently generated by all but a small percentage of providers (not so with HMOs, which bargain providers down to very small margins between cost and charge).

In order to ensure timely handling of claims, DPPN headquarters maintains a 24-hour hotline, where physician and facility providers can call to confirm benefits at the time of treatment. In addition, the DPPN will advise providers of the latest insurance issues for each case. Claims will be reviewed by the Network prior to insurance filing—this alone will go a long way toward ensuring prompt insurance company action. Divers can also call the Network to determine the status of a claim.

The goal of the Network is to ensure top quality for you, as a DAN member. Should you or a family member experience a diving accident, your evaluation, management and follow-up will be as effective and cost-efficient as modern medicine and technology allow. DAN remains Your Dive Safety Association, a nonprofit organization of divers dedicated to dive safety and the availability of dive medical expertise around the world.

CIRCLE NO. 74 ON READER SERVICE CARD

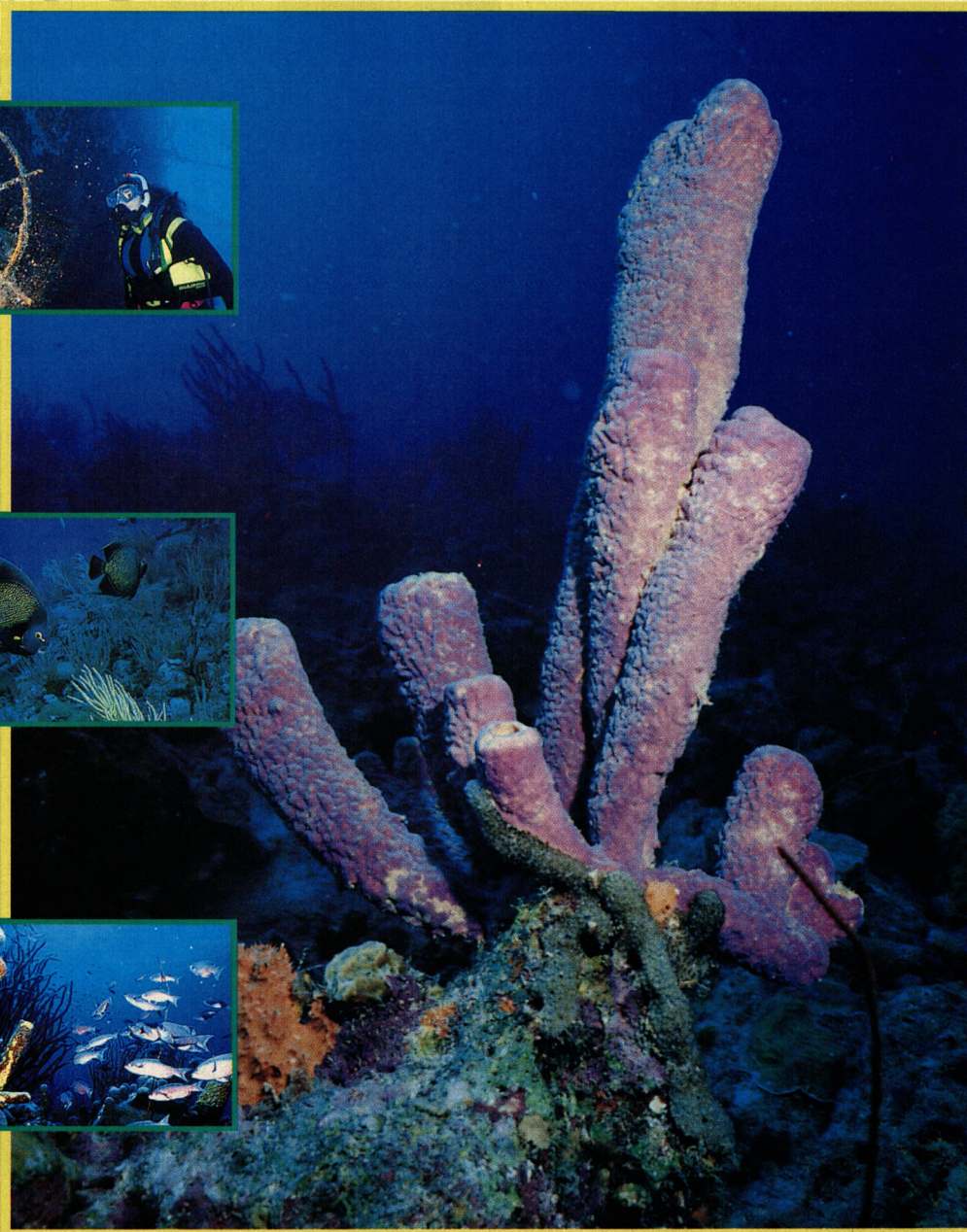
NOVEMBER 1-8, 1997

INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE REEF

BONAIRE

DIVE FESTIVAL

INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE REEF



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NOVEMBER 1-8, 1997

INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE REEF
BONAIRE
DIVE FESTIVAL
INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE REEF

What is it?

The Largest Environmental Diving Event in the Caribbean!

Have you always wanted to put your skill to the test and expand your horizons as a diver and a humanitarian? The International Year of the Reef Dive Festival is your way to make a difference. Join divers and snorkelers from around the globe for an historical event that turns diving into a proactive sport, as you become part of the solution to help keep the coral reefs alive.

Distinguished marine biologists and conservation organizations, environmental celebrities and the Bonaire Marine Park direct a jam-packed week of educational and recreational activities with everything from a conservation monitoring program to a competitive underwater rodeo. And expect nothing less than the best from Bonaire — the destination voted #1 in the Caribbean by the readers of *Rodale's Scuba Diving* and long respected for one of the healthiest reef systems in the Western Hemisphere.

Explore our 85 marked dive sites and enjoy underwater visibility of 100 feet. Thanks to the Bonaire Marine Park and a dedicated dive industry, the island is home to one of the top underwater environments in the world.

With Festival registration at only \$95 per person (tax deductible to the extent allowed by law), this opportunity to be part of history is only a phone call away to your travel agent or the exclusive festival wholesalers, Maduro Dive Fanta-Seas 800-327-6709 and Caradonna Caribbean Tours 800-328-2288.

Come to Bonaire where reefs rule!



Who and What

Who: Who better to keynote the opening ceremonies and lead a feature presentation than Dr. Sylvia Earle, world renowned for her conservation initiatives and infinite concern for marine eco-systems.

What: Core seminars present a once-in-a-lifetime sampler of five diving and environmental disciplines. Designed to combine education with vacation, the seminars will be presented on a rotating basis at each of the host hotels over five consecutive days (Nov. 2 - Nov. 6).

The seminars are scheduled for 3:30-5:30 p.m. with the corresponding seminar dive to follow the next day.

- **BMP (Bonaire Marine Park)**- To reinforce their formal seminar in "Practical Marine Protected Area Management," the Bonaire Marine Park will design a temporary underwater nature trail to showcase the underwater world unique to Bonaire. This "Best of Bonaire" program will emphasize the island's commitment to reef preservation and demonstrate why it makes good environmental and economic sense to protect and defend precious marine resources.

- **CORAL (Coral Reef Alliance)**- presents "Around the (Coral) World in 80 minutes" - a dramatic photographic tour of the underwater world of coral reefs that highlights the importance of coral reefs around the globe. Divers can learn about volunteer diving opportunities and other ways they can help keep coral reefs alive.

- **CMC (Center for Marine Conservation)**- The CMC will present a synopsis of their "Underwater Cleanup and Conservation Monitoring Program," which removes debris and tabulates the type of debris collected into major categories for inclusion in CMC's International Marine Database and Analysis. Working with the Bonaire Marine Park, the CMC seminar dive will clean up five previously identified sites in Bonaire.

- **DAN (Divers Alert Network)**- DAN will present "Project Dive Safety," an advanced dive safety seminar. This observational research study is designed to collect and analyze dive profile data on real dives and to compile data on behavioral and health aspects associated with recreational diving. Data collected will be recorded by dive computers and will be used in developing flexible, low-risk decompression procedures and studying the effects of flying after diving.

- **REEF (Reef Environmental Education Foundation)**- REEF's seminars will cover the identification and behaviors of fish of the Tropical Western Atlantic (with an emphasis on those found in Bonaire's waters) and an introduction to the survey methods used by REEF's volunteers. Following each seminar, participants will put their newfound knowledge to work by doing survey dives on the reefs of Bonaire. The data collected from the seminars will be entered into REEF's University of Miami database.

Schedule of Events

	morning	afternoon	evening
Saturday Nov 1	Arrivals/Registration	Arrivals/Registration	Arrivals/Registration
Sunday Nov 2	Bonaire Diver Orientation DIVES	Dives Core Seminar #1 3:30 - 5:30pm	Welcome Ceremony and Party
Monday Nov 3	DIVES	Dives Core Seminar #2 3:30 - 5:30pm	Dr. Sylvia Earle presents "Oceancare" Party
Tuesday Nov 4	DIVES	Dives Core Seminar #3 3:30 - 5:30pm	An Evening With Captain Don Stewart Party
Wednesday Nov 5	DIVES	Dives Core Seminar #4 3:30 - 5:30pm	Al Hornsby PADI Project Aware Party
Thursday Nov 6	DIVES	Dives Core Seminar #5 3:30 - 5:30pm	Photography Evening With the Pro's Party
Friday Nov 7	RODEO	Closing Activities Plaque Dedication	Closing Party
Saturday Nov 8	Departures	Departures	Departures

Featured Events

Our special series of festival events brings the opportunity to learn and socialize with the industry's best at featured events around the island. Ranging from expert panels to celebrity speeches and parties, these events make for great entertainment and camaraderie.

• **Dr. Sylvia Earle Presents "Oceancare"** - Referred to as "Her Deepness" by *The New York Times*, renowned marine biologist, author, lecturer and scientific consultant, Dr. Sylvia Earle will present "Oceancare," focusing on education, exploration and scientific advances for the best care of oceans everywhere.

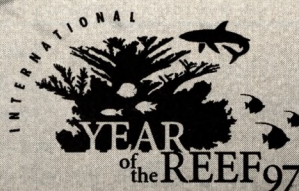
• **The Underwater Rodeo** - Underwater maneuvering was never so much fun! Test your skill with a clever underwater obstacle course as your teammates cheer you on from the docks above. With a strong environmental slant, the Underwater Rodeo is a fun way to reinforce the importance of athletic control and buoyancy, as well as respect for the reefs and marine life.

• **An Evening with Captain Don Stewart** - If you know or have met Captain Don, then you'll be prepared for a colorful evening of folklore and fantastic tales about Bonaire's history. Playing a significant role in shaping Bonaire's dive and tourism history, Captain Don is the founder of the island's first dive shop, the Council of Underwater Resort Operators (CURO) and Captain Don's Habitat.

• **A Photography Evening With the Pro's** - Festival participants will be invited to bring two or three of their favorite underwater photos with them and have them critiqued by a panel of renowned underwater photographers. This is a great opportunity to showcase your best shots, while learning how to make them even better.

• **The Closing Ceremony** - Just prior to the grand finale party, *Rodale's Scuba Diving* and *IYOR* will honor the Tourism Corporation Bonaire with the official presentation of a plaque for Bonaire's continued efforts and pioneering role in environmental preservation.

Sponsors:



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A premier dive resort on a premier island! Enjoy the unparalleled Sand Dollar Dive and Photo's convenience and ease of diving. Relax and watch a

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Plaza Resort Bonaire

Bonaire's 5-Star Resort



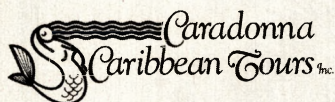
Bonaire's new 5-star resort with 224 luxurious suites and villas, a complete dive shop and watersports facility, 3 restaurants/ 3 bars, shops, activities desk, mini-market, 4 tennis courts (lit for night tennis), rental center with cars, scooters and Boston whalers, casino and a beautiful beach.

Special Dive Festival Packages Including Air From:
\$819quad./\$1027dbl.

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND TO MAKE RESERVATIONS:

1-800-328-2288

CIRCLE NO. 23 ON READER SERVICE CARD



1-800-328-2288

E-mail:
caradonna@aol.com
Web:
www.caradonna.com
Fax: 407-682-6000

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1-800-327-6709

or Fax: 305-438-4220

Hotel Representative **MADURO DIVE FANTA-SEAS**

http://www.bonaire.org/habitat

http://www.maduro.com e-mail: maduro@netpoint.net

CIRCLE NO. 20 ON READER SERVICE CARD

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SPECIAL DIVE FESTIVAL PACKAGES INCLUDING AIR FROM:
\$999dbl./\$869quad.

Call 1-800-328-2288

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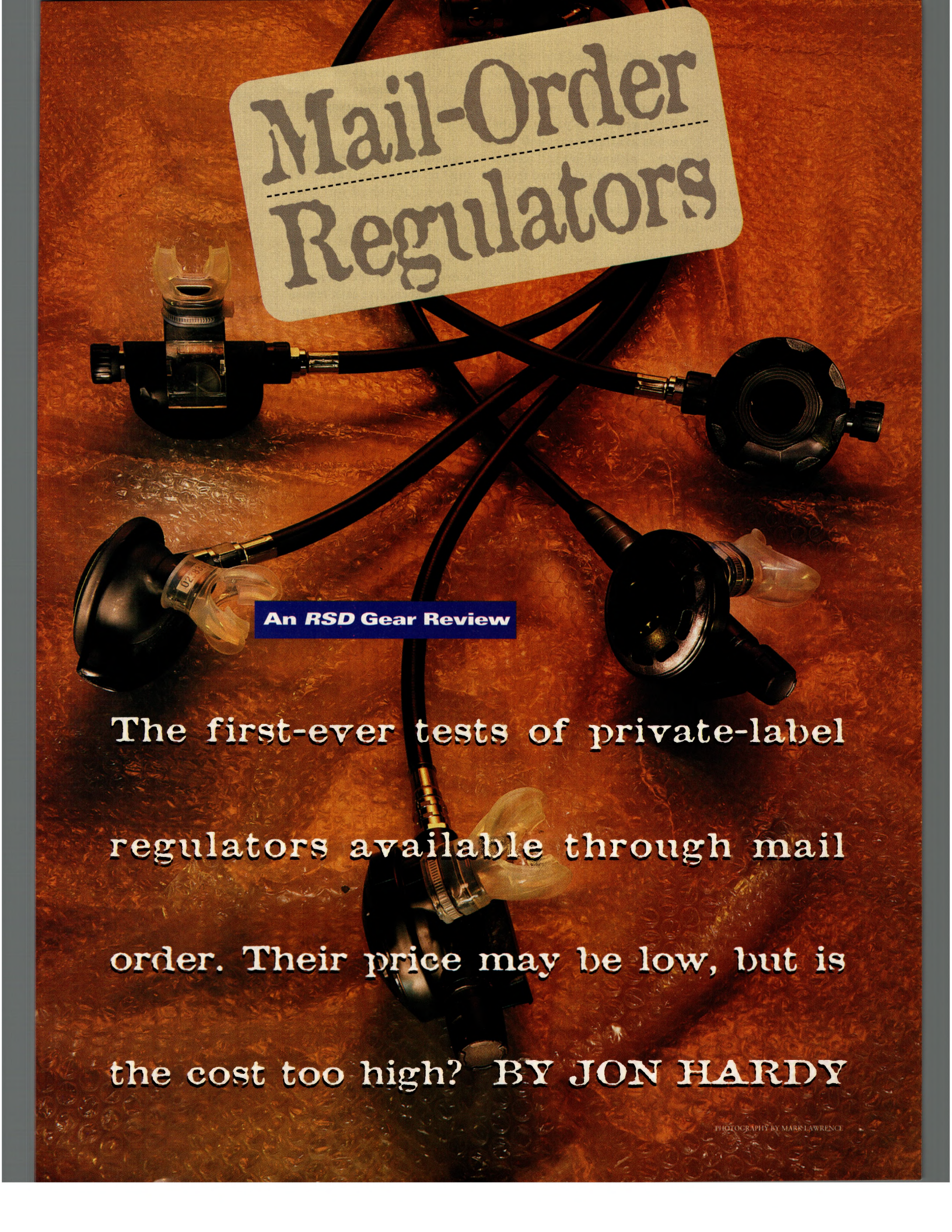


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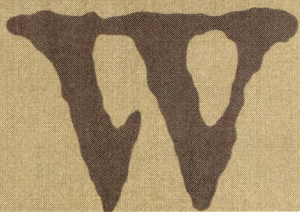


Mail-Order Regulators

An RSD Gear Review

The first-ever tests of private-label regulators available through mail order. Their price may be low, but is the cost too high? **BY JON HARDY**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARK LAWRENCE



hen ScubaLab tested and reported on 27 low-cost regulators in the July 1996 issue, the most often asked question from readers was, "What about the private-label brands available through mail order?" Although we had request-

ed some of these regulators in the past and even tried to buy some, none had been available or supplied. Undaunted, we researched the field, whipped out our credit cards, then proceeded to purchase by mail the five best private-label regulators we could find.

Why We Test

You can read ads and catalogs, talk to other divers or dive store sales personnel or, worse yet, read unqualified reports in other dive publications or on the internet newsgroups and message boards. But none of these will provide any objective comparative test results. That's why we test—so you can have specific and detailed factual data on which to base intelligent buying decisions.

How We Test

All of our regulator tests over the last five years have used the same fundamental criteria and scoring system, allowing results on individual regulators to be compared. Our test bed for comparison now includes over 170 different regulator models with 12 more currently undergoing tests.

Our first step with each regulator is to ensure it functions correctly. Next, all specifications, features and measurements supplied by the manufacturer are confirmed. Then at an engineering lab, ScubaLab personnel test each regulator on a breathing machine (simulator) that is designed to breathe the reg in water and under pressure in a repeatable and consistent way. These tests are both computer-controlled and computer-analyzed; they are used to stress the regulators to ascertain just how well they can perform. Each regulator is taken from the surface in 33-foot (10-meter) increments until it can no longer adequately deliver air.

Our breathing machine performance scoring criteria are based on three commonly accepted standards:

■ **U.S. Navy Class B.** At 132 feet with 1,500 psi supply pressure and 25 breaths per minute of 2.5 liters, the regulator's work of breathing (WOB) needs to be less than 1.4 joules per liter.

■ **European Standard (CE).** At 165 feet (50 meters) with 725 psi (50 bar) supply pressure and 25 breaths per minute of 2.5 liters, the regulator's WOB needs to be less than 3.0 joules per liter.

■ **U.S. Navy Class A.** Able to pass the same criteria as Class B, but at 198 feet.

We then use the Navy and CE standards to assign ScubaLab breathing machine scores from Outstanding (1) to Not Acceptable (5).

Next are open-water ergonomic (human engineering) tests. At ScubaLab we have established our own ergonomic standard because no adequate one was available. At 33 feet (10 meters), four or more divers (in these tests six were used), three men and three women, dive each regulator. The testers score and comment on the regulator's ease of breathing, use of diver adjustments, bubble interference, ease of clearing, performance in odd positions, how wet the regulator breathes, performance during air sharing, comfort and overall performance. All these scores are individually averaged on each regulator for each tester and then

CHART EXPLANATIONS

FIRST STAGE TYPE:

D = Diaphragm
P = Piston

FIRST STAGE PORTS:

HP = High Pressure
LP = Low Pressure

WORK OF BREATHING:

Actual reading in joules per liter of that regulator's best breathing machine run at 165 feet and 725 psi.

PERFORMANCE SCORES:

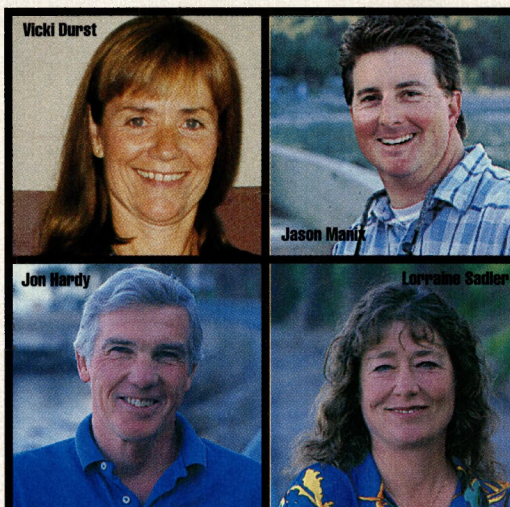
1 = Outstanding
2 = Excellent to Good
3 = Adequate
4 = Marginal
5 = Not Acceptable

TOTAL SCORES:

2 = An outstanding high performance regulator, quality beyond this price category
3 = The best of budget regulators, performance beyond this price category
4 = Good sound regulator
5 - 6 = Adequate
7 - 10 = Not worth consideration

PRICE:

Prices for private-label mail-order regulators do not include shipping and handling. Prices for comparison budget regulators are suggested retail prices and do not include sales, discount packaging or other discounts.



ScubaLab Test Divers

These regulator test dives were conducted by:

VICKI DURST—diving for 28 years with over 700 dives. Underwater instructor and college teacher.

JON HARDY—diving for 40 years with over 10,000 dives. Instructor evaluator and director of ScubaLab.

JASON MANIX—diving for eight years with over 4,000 dives. Advanced open-water instructor, working diver and ScubaLab coordinator.

CATHY MCBRIDE—diving for one year with over 50 dives. Advanced open-water diver and schoolteacher.

LORRAINE SADLER—diving for 30 years with nearly 6,000 dives. Instructor evaluator, hyperbaric technician and ScubaLab technician.

NEIL WYTHE—diving for eight years with over 1,500 dives. Divemaster candidate and commercial diver.

brought together for an overall average for that regulator. The last open-water test is conducted by four highly experienced ScubaLab divers at 165 feet (50 meters). Each diver tries as hard as possible to over-breathe each regulator. During this test only breathing characteristics are scored and commented on.

After tests are complete, the regulators are disassembled and the actual designs, airflow paths and quality control are checked.

Where to Buy a Regulator

Regulators can be purchased in dive stores, at other retail outlets, by mail order or as used equipment from private parties. There are distinct

BUDGET REGULATORS AT A GLANCE

	\$	1ST STAGE				2ND STAGE	WOB	PASS STANDARD?			PERFORMANCE		TOTAL SCORES
		Type	Swivel	# of ports		Number of Adjustments	Work of Breathing (joules per liter)	USN Class B	USN Class A	CE	Breathing Machine Score	Ergonomics Score	
BERRY SCUBA U.S. TECH CHALLENGER	\$230	D	YES	2	4	2	1.8j	YES	NO	NO	2	3	5
DIVER'S SUPPLY SEA ELITE QUEST PLUS	\$259	P	YES	2	4	1	2.6j	NO	NO	NO	3	4	7
LEISURE PRO BLUE REEF AIR PLUS	\$140	P	YES	2	4	NONE	2.3j	NO	NO	YES	3	4	7
MR. DIVER PIRATE THUNDERBOLT	\$170	P	YES	2	4	1	2.3j	NO	NO	NO	3	4	7
PERFORMANCE DIVER MELTRON SABA	\$225	D	NO	2	4	2	FAILED	NO	NO	NO	5	3	8

COMPARISON BUDGET REGS FROM PAST TESTS

DACOR ENDURO	\$250	D	NO	1	4	NONE	2.0j	NO	NO	YES	2	2	4
FORTE AQUIS DELUXE	\$250	P	YES	2	4	NONE	1.6j	YES	NO	YES	2	2	4
INTERNATIONAL DIVERS INC. (IDI) OSPREY	\$300	P	NO	1	3	NONE	1.8j	NO	NO	YES	2	1	3
OCEANIC ALPHA IV SPORT	\$200	P	NO	1	4	NONE	1.4j	YES	NO	YES	2	1	3
SEA QUEST MIRAGE	\$172	P	NO	1	4	NONE	1.9j	NO	NO	YES	2	1	3
U.S. DIVERS AQUARIUS	\$199	P	NO	1	4	NONE	1.9j	NO	NO	YES	2	1	3

advantages and disadvantages to each.

► **Private party.** Buying a used regulator from a private party may be the cheapest possible way to go, but provides absolutely no guarantees. Unless you are extremely knowledgeable or a regulator technician, you will not know if the regulator can even be serviced, and you will also not have any performance data. The seller's statement that the regulator "breathes fine" and your breathing on it out of the water are both meaningless. We recommend not buying used life-support equipment from private parties.

► **Non-dive store retail outlets.** Sporting goods and discount stores may have scuba gear for sale. Some of these stores actually have scuba departments and should be considered a dive store. However, most are simply retail outlets and cannot provide the service, support and expertise that a dive store can. Other than price, there is no reason to buy at these non-dive store outlets. And even price may not be an advantage since name-brand regulators can often be purchased at dive stores at discount prices.

► **Mail order.** Catalog buying is a popular and useful way to shop, particularly when some products are not available locally or may be purchased through a catalog for significantly less money (including shipping and handling charges).

But buying a regulator through the mail is not like buying a sweater. In particular, our concerns are these:

- Diver life-support products should not be sold to unqualified buyers.

- Dive gear should not be sold when operating incorrectly.
- Gear should not be sold to a diver without regard to proper fit and function.

- Little service or support is available by mail order, and a regulator that is not purchased locally may not be able to be serviced locally and may have no warranty.

If cost is your compelling selection criterion, we suggest consulting RSD's "Best Buy" lists for those products that offer the best performance for the price. The least expensive is not necessarily the best buy.

► **Dive stores.** Retail dive stores have been the focal point of local dive support since recreational diving became popular. Your local dive store can provide instruction, dive travel, local dives, inspection and repair services, compressed air, rental equipment, equipment advice and the opportunity to look at, feel, compare, and test equipment before purchase. In addition, the store can back up products immediately if necessary. Personal contact is also an important part of a dive store's value. Of particular importance with regulators is what the store can do to provide you with a complete and correct regulator set up that connects to your BC's inflator, dry suit, air-integrated instrument console, etc. (see "Dealer Prep," page 74). In short, a dive store is in a unique position to provide the service and support you need and should expect.

Regulators in Review

Berry Scuba U.S. Tech Challenger



The Challenger's second stage (same as the Meltron Saba's, see page 73) has two adjustments—a resistance dial on the end and a “Turbo Boost” on the hose side which is used to reduce free flows but is hard to grip. These adjustments function in opposite directions. An interesting feature of these second stages is the window over the exhaust non-return so you can see if it is sealed correctly.

The diaphragm first stage on the Challenger has a swivel, the only one of its type in this test group. There is a one-half-inch primary low-pressure port on the first stage, but the primary hose leading to the second stage was installed in a standard three-eighth-inch low-pressure port on the first stage. We tested both low-pressure ports on the breathing machine and found no significant difference.

When assembling the regulator, BC and tank combination, after other hoses have been installed (octopus, inflator and pressure gauge), the first stage makes it difficult to use the tank's hand wheel.

During open-water ergonomic tests, the Challenger's poor-test scores were while breathing in odd positions (in a head-down position or on the back), where it breathed wet or tended to free flow. The regulator's performance on the deep stress test was marginal, and one tester was able to over-breathe the Challenger.

When we placed our order at Berry's, no C-card (certification card) information was requested. The regulator was delivered in four days. There is a “satisfaction guarantee” that allows you to return the regulator unused in 30 days with the warranty. However, no warranty or instructions were supplied. Berry lists the Challenger at \$400 and on sale for \$230.

Diver's Supply Sea Elite Quest Plus

The Sea Elite's second stage (same as MR. Diver's Thunderbolt,

see page 72) has one resistance adjustment dial that requires 12 turns for the complete range of adjustment. At about two-thirds of the way open on this adjustment, the Elite went into a violent, uncontrollable free flow, thus failing this particular test.

The balanced piston first stage is a copy of the out-of-patent Scubapro MK V first stage. On disassembly, the flat seat in the first stage contained a deep cookie cut with loose, damaged material obvious. During breathing machine tests, the Elite was unstable in shallow water, and during the deep ocean stress tests it was generally hard breathing.

The Diver's Supply catalog claims the company designs and tests equipment, adding the statement: “The Sea Elite line



of regulators have been tested in very extreme diving conditions and have been proven to be ... easy to breathe.” The suggested retail price is stated as \$395 with a sale price of \$259, making it the most expensive of these regulators. The Elite has the lowest-rated performance of any regulator in this article that did not fail outright.

IDI REGULATORS

In RSD's past evaluations, International Divers Inc. (IDI) has had several regulators make both our “Best Buy” and “Testers' Choice” lists, including IDI's Osprey and Razor. In the regulator tests for this issue, both stages of the Blue Reef were labeled IDI, and the Thunderbolt came with a first stage labeled IDI. After contacting IDI, we learned that the Blue Reef is a regulator no longer manufactured or distributed by IDI. Regarding the Thunderbolt, the marketing director of IDI, Karl Kaiser, stated: “The Thunderbolt is not our regulator and should not have been attached to our first stage. They [Mr. Diver] did not have our permission to do so.”

No C-card was requested with our purchase. Delivery took four days. Diver's Supply provides a 30-day satisfaction guarantee provided the regulator is returned unused with warranty. However, no warranty or instructions were provided with the unit.

Leisure Pro Blue Reef Air Plus

Although the Leisure Pro catalog shows this regulator with the Blue Reef name on the second stage cover, it arrived at ScubaLab as an International Divers (IDI) SR3 regulator. Description and appearance matched except for the label. The first stage is the same as the Thunderbolt's, but our examination confirmed the second stage was that of a former

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IDI regulator.

The Leisure Pro catalog states that the Blue Reef regulator is based on "superior regulator technology" with an "Ultra Dry" system for the exhaust. This system uses a counterweight behind the exhaust non-return, which is intended to improve dryness and reduce bubble interference. The system does neither. Scores on ocean tests were no better than the scores of other regulators tested here. However, the weight significantly increases the breathing resistance on exhale, and produces the possibility that the weight will interfere with the non-return's ability to seat and therefore allow water to leak back through the exhaust.

This is the least expensive regulator we have ever tested and the only non-adjustable regulator in this group. All ergonomic tests at 33 feet were average and the deep stress test was

marginal, with one tester actually getting a non-breath (failure to deliver air).

When we placed our order there was no request for a C-card. A warranty card was included that identified the regulator as an IDI SR3. There were no instructions. Exchanges were allowed within two weeks.

Mr. Diver Thunderbolt

The Thunderbolt arrived invoiced as the Pirate Pro Dive with only a thunderbolt symbol (no name) on the second stage and "IDI" on the first stage. This first stage is the same as the Blue Reef and is another copy of the Scubapro MK V. The second stage is the same



BUYER BEWARE—Regulator Modifications

A number of fittings are sold (usually separately as add-ons) to make octopus hoses more convenient to use, to give a greater range of motion to primary hoses, to allow for the use of shorter hoses or to add more low-pressure ports to a first stage that does not have enough. We know that any fitting or change to your regulator between its first and second stage will affect its performance. However, what we haven't known is whether or not this effect is significant—until now. ScubaLab recently tested the five most common of these fittings. There were some clear winners and losers.

Octo Adapter

The Octo Adapter is used to place both your low-pressure power inflator and octopus regulator on the same hose. When tested on a stable, simple regulator, the reg's work of breathing increased by 70 percent at 132 feet and the regulator went off the scale before reaching 165 feet. Therefore,



when you are under the most stress—sharing air—the breathing resistance will go up substantially. The adapter also makes your octopus difficult to use.

RSD SCUBALAB RECOMMENDATION
Do not use. Instead, use an alternate inflation regulator, a separate octopus or a redundant system.



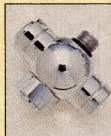
Angled Swivel Adapter

The Angled Swivel Adapter can provide a better angle of use for the octopus or primary hose. During testing, this adapter did not have any significant effect on regulator performance until after 200 feet.

RSD SCUBALAB RECOMMENDATION
Fine to use. Tech divers take care if the adapter is to be used at great depth.

LP 3 Port Swivel Adapter

The LP 3 Port Swivel Adapter is



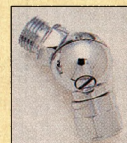
used to add more low-pressure ports on regulators that do not have enough. During testing, this adapter's efficiency depended upon which port was used and which direction the adapter was swiveled. As a result, regulator performance varied from less than detectable (using the straight-through port) to significant when using an angled port that swiveled 90 degrees. Work of breathing increases ranged from 20 percent to nearly 140 percent. Since there is no way to tell which position the swivel is in while this adapter is in use, there is no way for a diver to know how a regulator may be affected.

RSD SCUBALAB RECOMMENDATION
Do not use. Buy a regulator first stage with the correct number of low-pressure ports.

360° Regulator Swivel

The 360° Regulator Swivel is used to provide a greater range of motion to any regulator hose. We have tested these in

the past and retested them for this report in the same manner as all of the above adapters. This swivel has so little effect on regulator performance that a diver would not be able to detect it.



RSD SCUBALAB RECOMMENDATION
Use it. It adds to comfort with no performance loss.

Twist In-line Integral Swivel

The Twist In-line Integral Swivel is used by ProSub on some of their octopus regulators. We tested this device for a feature on alternate air sources in the Jan. '95 issue of RSD. This swivel had a significant effect on performance with no way for you to know when it would increase the regulator's work of breathing, since the degree of effect depends on what position the swivel is in.

RSD SCUBALAB RECOMMENDATION
Do not use.

—JON HARDY

as that of the Sea Elite. It also required the same excessive number of turns (12) to get from one extreme to the other in its range of adjustment. But the Thunderbolt failed this particular test in a manner opposite the Sea Elite's failure: the Thunderbolt would not stop free flowing in the hardest breathing position.

The catalog states that the Thunderbolt has "ultra low breathing resistance." However, we found this regulator to be unstable on the breathing machine in shallow water. During ocean tests it free flowed, was difficult to purge and was over-breathed during the deep stress tests. It did have the best score of any regulator tested here on sharing air, because it has the longest and most flexible hose.

There was no C-card check on ordering, and delivery took four days. Return policy was to send the regulator back unused in 30 days with warranty. However, no instructions or warranty were included.



Performance Diver Meltron Saba

The Saba has a diaphragm first stage made in Italy. The Saba has the same second stage as the Challenger, so all those comments also apply here.

During shallow-water ergonomic tests, the Saba's breathing was not smooth or consistent. Its poorest score was in odd positions, where it free flowed or breathed wet. During the deep stress tests, the Saba's performance was marginal and inconsistent.

The owner instructions say that the recommended intermediate pressure range (first to second stage air delivery) is 145 to 155 psi. The actual pressure fluctuated between 105 and 141 psi, a variation of up to 36 psi. For comparison, a high-performance regulator would have a stable pressure drop in the range of 10 to 25 psi and lock up at its designed pressure.

Breathing machine tests were the most revealing of all. The Saba failed, going off the scale on breathing resistance (work of breathing)

For More Information

Regulator tests have been featured in these issues of RSD:

March '93—Regs Under \$300

June '93—Regs \$300 to \$400

July '93—Regs Over \$400

January '95—Alternate Air

Sources

June '95—High-Performance
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Some equipment reviews are also available online at RSD's web site, www.scubadiving.com.

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repeatedly between 99 and 132 feet. This failure on the breathing machine made it impossible to conduct the Navy Class B test. The U.S. Navy tested Performance Diver's prior regulator, the PDXL 1000, and reported in NEDU Report No. 6-94, that "this regulator is not capable of meeting the performance criteria." The same is clearly true of the newer Saba.

In an effort to determine the nature of failure in the Saba, we tested the first and second stages separately. We found the sudden drop in performance was due to the second stage. A concern is that a diver would have no idea of when or what combination of depth, supply pressure, and breathing rate would suddenly cause the Saba's performance to become unacceptable.

Performance Diver did ask for a C-card. We paid for next-day delivery and the regulator arrived seven days later. A warranty card, free regulator service coupon and owner's instructions were all included. Although the return policy was not clear, it appeared to be the most liberal of the regulators tested here.

Conclusion

So what does all this mean? Here we have evaluated five private-label regulators we purchased by mail order. In summary, no matter what the price, name or method of distribution, these five do not deserve your consideration as viable life-support equipment. ☹

RSD's *ScubaLab* is located on Catalina Island, Calif. Next month *ScubaLab* reports on new high-performance regulators.

Dealer Prep

Scuba regulators are like new cars—they need dealer prep to be at their best when you drive away. So before you leave your dive store, go through this checklist:

- ✓ Make sure you've received complete instructions, both written and verbal, on how best to use and care for the regulator.
- ✓ Check the manufacturer's warranty and make sure that each item covered can be handled quickly and pleasantly by the dive store.
- ✓ Add on other components to complete your system, such as instruments, inflator hoses, alternate regulators or hose protectors.
- ✓ Be sure the hoses are the correct length for you.
- ✓ Check the comfort and fit of the mouthpiece.
- ✓ Make sure the dust cap is of solid rubber or plastic and is attached securely to the regulator yoke.
- ✓ Have the technician confirm that all hoses and port plugs have been removed; that the threads have been checked for any metal debris left from the manufacturing process; that all O-rings have been cleaned, lubricated and installed; and that all hoses and plugs have been securely replaced.
- ✓ Have the unit tested by the store's technician on a test bench to assure it operates within specifications and has no leaks.
- ✓ If any of the fittings or adjustments seems wrong, speak up. Your dive store wants you to walk out happy and confident so you'll return for the quality of their equipment and their service.

Please note: It is not possible to effectively complete this list anywhere other than at a dive store.

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CIRCLE NO. 13 ON READER SERVICE CARD

You're Out of Air— Now What?

Out of air beneath all that water; it's a beginning diver's biggest fear. It shouldn't happen, and it rarely does, but just in case ...

► **By JON HARDY**

What should you do if you run out of air? This has always been one of the most frequently asked and significant questions for new and experienced divers. Even more so today. Not because the answers have changed, but rather because our understanding of the out-of-air situation and the way divers are equipped have evolved. As a result, the choice of which ascent you make and how you make it may be completely different today than it was a few years ago.

Are You Really Out of Air?

Probably not. What you sense as an out-of-air situation is usually a low-on-air situation. Indeed, in nearly all scuba accidents, the victim still has air and the regulator still functions. What usually happens is that divers breathe their air supply down so low that the regulator can no longer provide air at the effort level required by the diver. In theory, this occurs when ambient (surrounding) pressure equals tank pressure. At 100 feet this would be about 60 psi. This is not what actually occurs, however. Regulator studies and diver experience have shown that because of the mechanics and maintenance of regulators, diver breathing habits

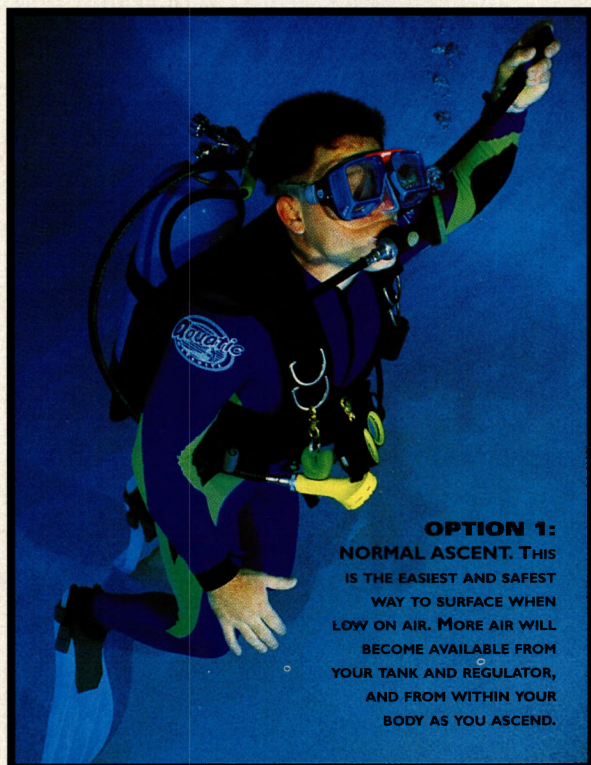
and rates, and the inaccuracies of submersible pressure gauges, the diver will feel out of air at a tank pressure higher than ambient pressure and that this disparity increases with depth. These are among the reasons why the current practice is to surface with 500 to 800 psi remaining, rather than 300 psi.

Equipment or Human Failure?

Equipment can fail, but does so rarely. With a regulator, failure usually takes the form of an air leak, a water leak or a free flow. If there is a problem with the regulator, it usually still delivers air, creating an inconvenience rather than a serious situation. In spite of what textbooks and instructors might say, we do not learn to make emergency ascents because of the possibility of equipment failures, but because of human errors. This significant fact does not change the ascent options available, but it may change which option the diver chooses and how that ascent is performed.

The Powerful Inflator

The use of power inflators and alternate or octopus regulators has become nearly universal over the past several years. Both have

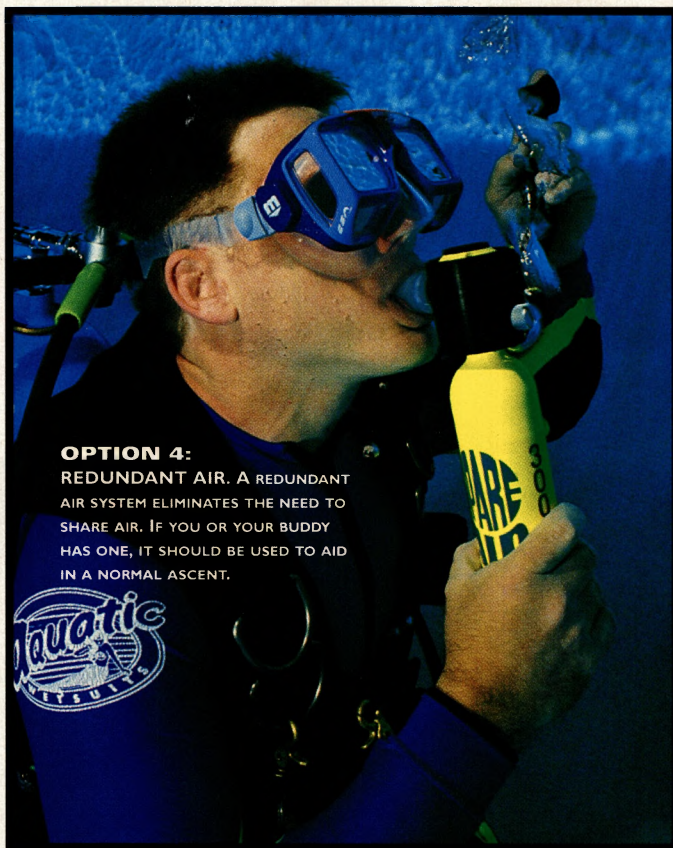


OPTION 1:
NORMAL ASCENT. THIS IS THE EASIEST AND SAFEST WAY TO SURFACE WHEN LOW ON AIR. MORE AIR WILL BECOME AVAILABLE FROM YOUR TANK AND REGULATOR, AND FROM WITHIN YOUR BODY AS YOU ASCEND.

**OPTION 3:
EMERGENCY
BUOYANT ASCENT.** IF
YOU FEEL YOU CAN'T MAKE
THE SURFACE BY SWIMMING
AND USING YOUR BC, DITCH
YOUR WEIGHTS. EMERGENCY
BUOYANT ASCENTS ARE
FASTER, BUT NOT
AS FAST AS SOME
DIVERS BELIEVE.



**OPTION 4:
REDUNDANT AIR.** A REDUNDANT
AIR SYSTEM ELIMINATES THE NEED TO
SHARE AIR. IF YOU OR YOUR BUDDY
HAS ONE, IT SHOULD BE USED TO AID
IN A NORMAL ASCENT.



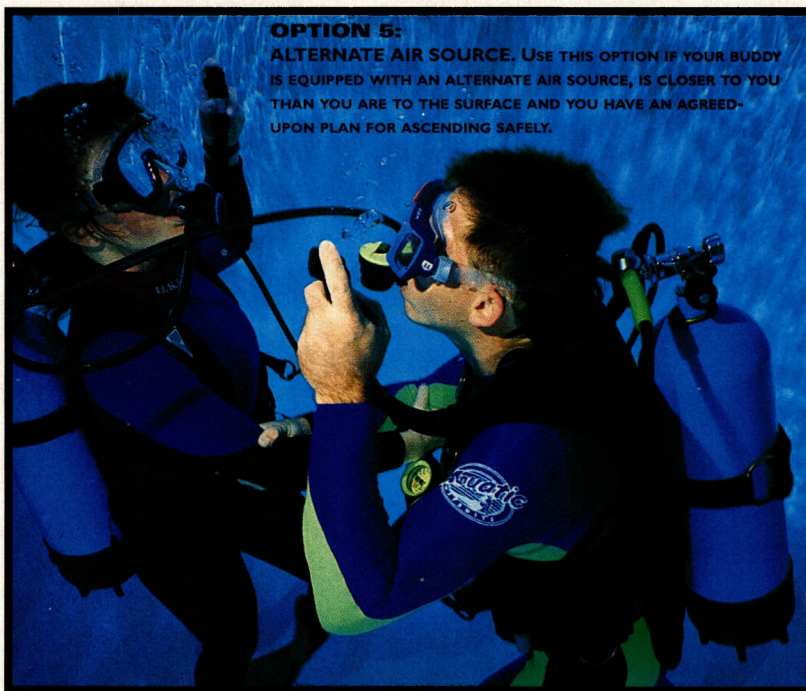
a significant bearing on emergency ascent choices. A little-known fact about power inflators is that they will continue to function at a lower tank pressure than that at which a diver can comfortably continue to breathe from a regulator. At low tank pressures and greater depths, the flow rate is slower, but the power inflator still works even when the demand-valve regulator produces an out-of-air sensation for the diver.

Don't Forget to Inhale

Another misunderstood rule concerns breathing and equalizing during ascents. It sounds so simple in the textbooks: "Always exhale while you ascend." But this is only half the story. Actually, if you relax and keep breathing out or in, you will be fine. The only way you can hold your breath during an ascent is to do so forcefully, as happens in a state of panic.

Otherwise, a relaxed diver is continuously venting. Excess air will flow out of the lungs as long as the airway is kept open through inhaling or exhaling. Continuing to breathe in and out is the best possible way to surface, as it is closest to a normal ascent. Ideally, you do not want your lungs to approach being either full or empty.

**OPTION 5:
ALTERNATE AIR SOURCE.** USE THIS OPTION IF YOUR BUDDY
IS EQUIPPED WITH AN ALTERNATE AIR SOURCE, IS CLOSER TO YOU
THAN YOU ARE TO THE SURFACE AND YOU HAVE AN AGREED-
UPON PLAN FOR ASCENDING SAFELY.



Speed Laws

In low-air or out-of-air situations, the speed of ascent is not nearly as important as was once thought. With healthy lungs and a clear airway, divers can ascend at remarkably high speeds. Today the recommended normal ascent rate is 30 feet per minute. Yet during out-of-control ascents performed while testing BCs, members of ScubaLab have achieved rates of 540 feet per minute, and the British Royal Navy has achieved even higher rates, both with no harm

to the divers. The point: ascent rate is more critical to avoiding decompression than lung overpressure. While avoiding it should always be a concern, DCS is less of a danger than having no air to breathe at depth. Of course, using a buddy's alternate air source can eliminate the need to ascend quickly.

4 GOLDEN RULES Of Emergency Ascents

No matter the type of emergency ascent you're making, it's important that you:

- 1 Perform the ascent with your BC control in hand, ready to use.
- 2 Keep your regulator in your mouth so you can continue to use it, keep water out of your mouth, maintain normal control and have the psychological security of the regulator in place.
- 3 Look up, relax and continue breathing in and out.
- 4 If at all possible (buoyancy and air allowing), perform a safety stop at about 15 feet using the remaining air from your cylinder.

Out-of-Air Options

Before looking at the particular techniques for making emergency ascents when low on air, remember that these techniques should be unnecessary in the first place. The problems that lead to emergency situations are easily prevented by following safe diving practices. But mistakes do occur, and you need to know your options when they do.

OPTION 1:



Normal Ascent

Or as normal as possible. This is the easiest, quickest and safest way to surface when low on air. You can push off the bottom, kick and use the power inflator on your BC. Remember, more air will become available from the tank, from the regulator and from within your body as you ascend. Also, your buoyancy will increase as the air in the BC or dry suit expands, or as your neoprene suit expands. With the additional air that becomes available, you will be able to continue breathing on the way to the surface. With the additional buoyancy, you may even need to dump air from the BC and/or flare (stretch out your arms and legs as wide as possible and arch your back so you face the surface) to slow the ascent. The ascent should be made with as much control as possible.

OPTION 2:



Emergency Swimming Ascent

An emergency swimming ascent is similar to the nor-

mal ascent, but done faster, so you have less control.

OPTION 3:



Emergency Buoyant Ascent

If for any reason you feel you can't make the surface by swimming and using the BC, then simply ditch your weights. The ascent now becomes an emergency buoyant ascent. You will go faster and have less control, but you still can breathe in and out, dump

air from your BC and flare as necessary. Emergency buoyant ascents are a faster and surer method, but they are not nearly as fast as some divers who have never tried them believe. You can still slow down (though not stop) and you do not pop out of the water as you arrive at the surface. With all ascents, the key is to look up, relax and continue breathing in and out.



OPTION 4: Redundant Air

Redundant air systems, such

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In a Nutshell

In a low-on-air situation, your first choice of action should be a normal ascent. If a normal ascent is not possible, you can take either independent or dependent action. Independent action is often quicker and easier, plus it does not risk another diver's safety, but it may not be possible. Dependent action can provide for slower ascents and a safety stop, but requires another diver and/or additional equipment.

Low on Air Situation

Independent Action	Dependent Action
Emergency Swimming Ascent	Redundant Air System
Emergency Buoyant Ascent	Sharing Air (alternate air source)
	Buddy Breathing

as a pony bottle or Spare Air, eliminate the need to share air and can be used more easily than an octopus. If you or your buddy has one, it should be used to aid in a normal ascent.

OPTION 5:



Alternate Air Source

If your buddy has an alternate air source, is closer to you than you are to the surface, and you have an agreed-upon plan—then go to your buddy and share air. You may also need to use an alternate air source because of an obstruction preventing a direct ascent to the surface, such as when swimming in a wreck, under heavy kelp, inside a cave, under ice, needing to decompress, or being at great depth. Textbooks and instructors have not agreed on how best to use an alternate air source. What is important is for you and your buddy to agree on how you will use it. Remember your power inflator will still work while you are using your buddy's alternate air source, so each of you can become neutrally buoyant and then make a controlled ascent using buoyancy to assist you.

OPTION 6:



Buddy Breathing

Buddy breathing should be your last resort. This is an

obsolete skill that is still taught in some courses. Many divers do not understand how much easier it is to make an independent ascent (normal, emergency swimming or emergency buoyant) or to use an alternate air source or redundant system. The skill of buddy breathing is far too difficult for most divers to be able to remember and use under stress while ascending. Accident reports indicate that we'd be better off if we never had to attempt buddy breathing in an emergency. Divers have an obligation to equip themselves properly, and that means having access to an alternate air source on every dive.

Avoiding the Last Resort

Changed thinking, new understanding and new equipment have made diving safer today than ever before. Emergency ascents shouldn't be necessary, but they can be performed safely when needed. Low-on-air situations should be prevented or avoided, but if not, you have several viable options. The goal is to avoid the very last option: diver rescue.

Jon Hardy has been teaching scuba diving since 1958 and is current with NAUI, PADI and SSI. His highest rating is Instructor Evaluator.

Nitrogen Narcosis

The mental impairment caused by nitrogen at depth is something all divers must learn to deal with—or else.

► By **JOHN FRANCIS**

Of the many hazards of deep diving, the most insidious may be nitrogen narcosis. Its onset is hard to recognize, its severity is unpredictable—and it can kill. Although few diving fatalities are blamed directly on nitrogen narcosis, it is likely a contributing cause in many scuba accidents. However, narcosis is controllable. And unless you are a rare hypersensitive diver, narcosis is no reason to be afraid of deep water. Provided, that is, you take precautions—including a deep-diving course from a qualified instructor.

Isn't it called "Rapture of the Deep"?

Yes, but this old-fashioned name for nitrogen narcosis is misleading. Narcosis doesn't always feel rapturous, and you don't have to go all that deep to get it. Nitrogen narcosis is an impairment of your mental processes that occurs when diving, usually on compressed air. It can take the form of exhilaration and giddiness, but it can also manifest itself as extreme anxiety and depression. Frequently, your emotional state—whatever it is—will be heightened. If you're diving in warm clear water and happy about it, you're likely to become euphoric. But if it's cold and dark down there and you're not happy about it, you're more likely to become paranoid.

What's important to remember is that nitrogen narcosis impairs your mental judgment, your ability to recognize danger and avoid it. Under its influence you can become so lost in the beauty of the dive that you forget to check your instruments and lose track of time, winding up too deep with too little air. Stories are also told of narced divers who have abandoned their regulators as though they could breathe like fish. On the other hand, in cold,



dark water you may become so paralyzed by fear that you're unable to act at all.

But that's never happened to me!

That's what you think. Hal Watts, president of the Professional Scuba Association, who has trained thousands of divers in deep diving, points out that many divers have been substantially narced but don't know it because they were never called upon to do anything but breathe. It's when an emergency arises that narcosis shows its dark side.

What causes nitrogen narcosis?

Scientists aren't sure, but most now accept what's called the Meyer-Overton hypothesis, that narcosis happens when the gas penetrates the lipids (the fatty structures) of the brain's nerve cells. Here it apparently interferes with the transmission of signals from one nerve cell to another and disrupts your central processor. It's a little like spilling a Coke onto your computer keyboard.

It's a problem only if I go really deep, right?

Nitrogen narcosis affects every diver dif-

ferently, but a test conducted in the 1970s found that at 100 feet, 100 percent of divers were narced to some degree. A more recent Navy test in a recompression chamber found measurable deterioration in thinking skills at the second atmosphere: 33 feet. Today's rule of thumb is that below 60 feet you should be thinking of the possibility of narcosis, and below 100 feet you should expect it.

How quickly does narcosis come on? Will a short, deep dive be safe?

Don't equate narcosis with the delayed effect of alcohol. Nitrogen narcosis begins within seconds after you reach depth. Actually, it has begun in a small way as soon as you've left the surface.

How can I tell if I'm narced?

That's a tough one, because nearly the first thing that goes away is the sense that anything is wrong—unless you've got the paranoia version of nitrogen narcosis, in

which case everything feels wrong even when it isn't. For example, it's often said that one symptom of nitrogen narcosis is a false sense of security and inappropriate euphoria. But if you're narced, chances are you might be so entranced by your feelings that you won't immediately recognize them as false and inappropriate.

Other symptoms you may feel are dizziness, ringing in the ears, reduced motor skills, numbness of lips, trouble reading instruments and a sweet or metallic taste to your air. Or you may feel none of these

Narc Me Not A PREVENTION CHECKLIST

- Take a course in deep diving from a qualified instructor.
- Be rested.
- Avoid alcohol and drugs.
- Use a high-performance regulator.
- Exhale thoroughly, to expel more carbon dioxide.
- Plan your dive, dive your plan.
- Watch yourself. Sure, it's supposed to be fun, but this much fun?
- Monitor your buddy. Does he seem uncoordinated? Silly? Odd?
- Avoid becoming fatigued under water.
- Monitor your instruments, and believe them.
- When in doubt, ascend.



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and still be impaired.

If your buddy isn't narced, he may be able to recognize it in you, which is another reason for staying close together.

Isn't there some way to test myself for narcosis?

Some experienced deep divers have developed rule-of-thumb tests you and your buddy can perform together. For example, Bret Gilliam, one-time world-record-holder for depth and author of *Deep Diving*, suggests devising simple tests such as showing your buddy two fingers. He must respond by showing you three. Or if you hold up three fingers, he must hold up four. If either of you botches the arithmetic, suspect narcosis.

Hal Watts suggests a conference with your buddy every two minutes on a deep dive, where you each check both air gauges, write down both figures on your slates and each point to which figure is yours, which is your buddy's. Besides checking for mental impairment, this drill also has the obvious advantage of monitoring air consumption.

But don't rely entirely on a test. By force of concentration, a diver can overcome narcosis to do well on a test yet still

be dangerously narced if an emergency arises. Assume you will be narced below 100 feet, and maybe shallower.

Isn't there some good news?

Yes, a lot of it. With preparation, you can reduce the severity of narcosis. With training, you can develop a tolerance to it. And with concentration and discipline, you can dive safely despite being slightly narced.

Preparation means being rested, in good health, properly trained and equipped, and confident of what you are about to do. Fatigue or a hangover can bring on nitrogen narcosis. So can a high carbon dioxide level caused by an inadequate regulator. So can anxiety. Alcohol and drugs, even over-the-counter

tac, Sudafed and Dramamine, can significantly magnify the narcotic effect of nitrogen.

Training your body by diving deep repeatedly can create a specific tolerance to nitrogen narcosis. If you build up to a deep dive over a week by making the first dive of each day progressively deeper, you'll be far less likely to become narced. That tolerance dissipates within a week or so, however. But even on a single dive

Deep Confessions

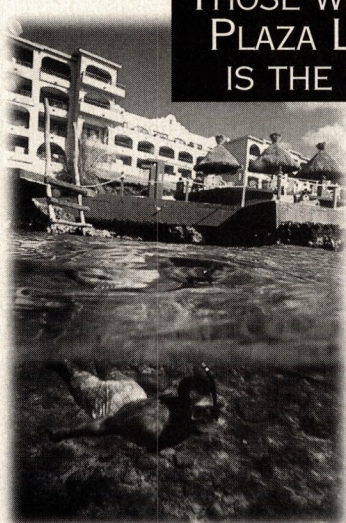
We were going down to 200 feet. I looked at my buddy and he didn't seem to be handling his buoyancy right, didn't seem coordinated, so I gave him the 'up' signal. He shook his head 'no.' I gave him the 'up' signal again, and he shook his head 'no' again. So I physically grabbed him and forced him up. At the surface, I asked him why he'd refused my 'up' signal. He said, 'Up? I was so narced I thought you were signaling down! I wasn't about to go deeper!' He literally didn't know up from down."

—Hal Watts, *Forty Fathom Grotto*,
The Professional Scuba Association

"I was down at about 100 feet on a pinnacle. It was cold and dark, but calm—nothing to worry about. Nevertheless, I became convinced my regulator was going to pop out of my mouth and spent the whole dive holding it in with my hand."

—John Francis, *Field Editor, RSD*

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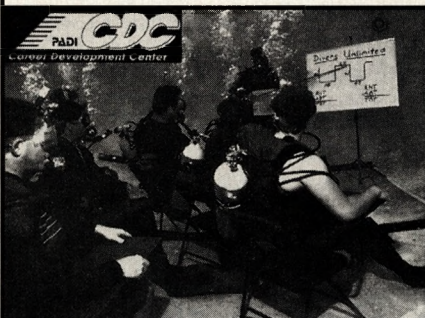
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It All Adds Up

Depth (actually, the increased partial pressure of nitrogen in your air supply caused by depth) is the prime factor in narcosis. Below 60 feet, some narcosis is possible; below 100 feet, some is certain. But other factors can combine with depth to make a mild case of narcosis severe, even dangerous.



Alcohol. As if there weren't enough other reasons for not drinking and diving, alcohol combined with nitrogen is likely to bring on a far more serious case of narcosis. Even a hangover, combined with the reduced physical capacity that goes with it, makes nitrogen narcosis more likely.



Drugs. Even innocuous over-the-counter drugs like those used to control cold symptoms and motion sickness have been shown to accelerate the onset of nitrogen narcosis. It's hard to say which drugs do and which don't as all divers respond to them differently, but the dangerous drugs are probably those that have a sedative effect, which slows the nerve impulses. As a rule of thumb, any drug that causes dryness of the mouth is suspect.



High Carbon Dioxide. High partial pressure of carbon dioxide, as a result of fatigue or a poor-breathing regulator, combines with the high partial pressure of nitrogen to accentuate narcosis. Shallow breathing also builds excess carbon dioxide. Concentrate on making complete exhalations and use a regulator adequate for the diving you're doing.



Stress. Both physical stress—trying to do too much—and mental stress—such as anxiety—can make nitrogen narcosis more dangerous. One reason may be that both tend to increase carbon dioxide levels.



Vertigo. Losing your "up" reference by making a head-down descent in the deep blue can bring on dizziness and, in turn, facilitate the onset of nitrogen narcosis.



The Little Things. Cold, illness, lack of sleep, a fast descent, feeling rushed for time, unfamiliar equipment—almost anything that makes you less than a calm, rested and prepared diver—can contribute to nitrogen narcosis.

you may be able to achieve some tolerance. If you become narcosis, you can ascend 10 feet or so and the narcosis will likely go away in a few moments. Then, many divers can return to the original depth with no narcosis.

Discipline may be your best antidote to nitrogen narcosis. If you concentrate and stay focused, you can probably overcome the worst of its effects. For example, in studies of nitrogen narcosis where divers are required to perform arithmetic problems at various depths, highly motivated divers can concentrate so intensely that they perform nearly as well at depth as at the surface—despite their narcosis. Discipline also means planning your dive and being determined about following your plan. It means watching your buddy and watching your instruments. It means staying alert to signs of narcosis and immediately ascending until they go away. And if you have repeated trouble with nitrogen narcosis, discipline means accepting the fact that

you are unusually sensitive to it and that your personal depth limit must be 60 feet, 90 feet or whatever.

Are there after-effects I should know about?

More good news. Nitrogen narcosis dissipates almost immediately, in most cases before you reach the surface. It seems to have no long-term ill effects. Commercial divers live with it as a manageable hazard, and sport divers at shall-

Up Your Gas

Any inert gas can cause narcosis. But some are less narcotic than others, depending in part on their solubility. Helium is only one-quarter as narcotic as nitrogen, which is why helium-oxygen mixtures are often used in very deep diving. In recreational diving, one of the advantages of nitrox is that its reduced nitrogen content (usually 68 percent versus 78 percent in air) can theoretically reduce the chances of narcosis.

lower depths and shorter bottom times need not feel significantly restricted by fear of nitrogen narcosis.



How to Beat Jet Lag

Your body's in one time zone, your head's in another and your luggage may be in a third. We can help you with the first two.

► By **SAMUEL SHELANSKI, M.D.**

Remember Plastic Man? The superhero who could stretch his neck s-o-o-o long that his head could be in one time zone while his body was in another? Well, that's us after a long flight.

We usually wander tired and befuddled for several days until our bodies catch up with our heads. This confused state is what we refer to as jet lag, and it's been blamed for everything from poor athletic performances to the Suez Canal crisis.

What Is Jet Lag?

Jet lag refers to a constellation of symptoms that afflict people who fly east-to-west or west-to-east for long distances. Its primary symptom is disturbed sleep patterns. The resulting fatigue is then responsible for the fuzzy head, difficulty in concentrating and irritability that many of us associate with jet lag.

The complaints of sore throat, dry eyes and muscular aches and pains that are often lumped together with jet lag are more accurately due to the dry, cramped environment of the airplane, and are not really part of the jet lag syndrome.

What Causes Jet Lag?

Jet lag is a modern ailment, brought about by the introduction of affordable, long-distance air travel. It is caused by a disruption of the body's circadian rhythms. These rhythms, which determine our sleep patterns and other bodily functions, are caused by hormonal ebbs and flows in the brain's pineal gland.

Jet lag occurs when a person flies across several time zones, and thereby throws the body's internal clock off-kilter.

The farther you fly, the greater the effect. But normally people don't feel significant effects unless they've crossed at least three time zones, such as New York to Los Angeles. Standing in Chicago at 2 p.m. while your body thinks it's 3 p.m. in New York isn't so bad. But try arriving in Fiji at 2 p.m. when your body's clock is still on New York time and thinks it's 7 a.m. the day before.

Since jet lag requires crossing time zones, north-to-south travel doesn't produce the same symptoms. There is some question as to whether east-to-west is easier than west-to-east, but personally I have never found one to be easier than the other. While just about everyone will experience some degree of jet lag on a long flight, not everyone is affected to the same degree. Children, people with highly variable schedules, and people who can sleep anywhere will be affected the least, while those with highly regimented schedules and those who are light sleepers will usually find that they are the worst off.

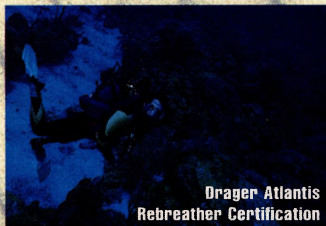
Can I Prevent Jet Lag?

Most of the tricks to minimize the effects of jet lag are common sense. Make sure that you get a good night's sleep before you travel, stay well hydrated, and avoid alcohol and drinks with caffeine. When packing, set aside a few things that will help assure some physical comfort during the long flight. A neck pillow, eye shade, earplugs, fleece blanket and large water bottle can help make the difference between a few hours of sleep and a cold, restless flight. If you are trying to sleep, then ask for a window seat so that you don't have to move repeatedly to allow someone access to the bathroom and so that you are away from aisle traffic.



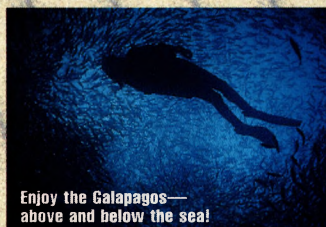
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Many people use sleeping pills to help them sleep on long flights. While this is effective for some people, others find that it leaves them with a hungover feeling that can exacerbate jet lag rather than help alleviate it. Make sure that you discuss the use of these medications with your physician before taking them. The latest medication to receive widespread attention for its use in alleviating jet lag is melatonin (see sidebar).

Lack of exercise is one of the worst parts of long-haul flying, and it can contribute to jet lag by making you physically uncomfortable and preventing sleep. The aching joints and muscles that are frequently experienced after long flights are also due primarily to long periods of immobility. But this syndrome is not just a matter of comfort; it is also a health issue. Sitting in one place for an extended period of time allows the blood to pool in the veins where it can clot. This is what happened to then-Vice President Dan Quayle several years ago when he was flying a great deal. These blood clots can then potentially travel to the lungs and other parts of the body, causing serious problems.

The lesson: move around. If you are not sleeping, then get up and stretch, do laps up and down the aisle. Many flights are crowded, but do what you can to ensure that you stretch out your muscles and keep the blood moving. You'll feel much better for it after the flight.

Finally, there are many books that

THE MAGIC OF MELATONIN?

Produced by the brain's pineal gland, melatonin is a hormone that helps regulate the body's circadian rhythms. Current theory is that the pineal gland is stimulated by darkness to release a surge of melatonin, which makes us tired and tells us that it's time to sleep. Supposedly, taking melatonin will produce an artificial surge of the hormone that will help you sleep and reset your body's circadian rhythms. There has been a fair amount of research done on this hypothesis and on melatonin's role in treating insomnia and jet lag. So far, research appears to confirm that melatonin is a relatively safe drug, and that it may help some people overcome jet lag.

While melatonin is widely available in health food stores and mail-order catalogs, it is important to realize that the use of melatonin is not approved by the FDA for any condition, and that there are no guarantees of safety, purity or efficacy when you buy this drug. Melatonin has been hailed as everything from a chemical fountain of youth to a cure for cancer, and most things in between. As always, consult your physician before taking this or any medication.

For more information on melatonin, see the melatonin web site at www.melatonin.com.

suggest various techniques for minimizing jet lag. These recommendations range from seat selection and diet to light therapy and which mantra to chant. One book that has been widely praised is *Overcoming Jet Lag* by Dr. Charles F. Ehret and Lynne Waller Scanlon. This book lays out a very precise diet and sleep schedule designed to help you reset your body clock when traveling. It suggests different schedules depending upon whether you are traveling east or west, and how many time zones you will be crossing.

People who have tried the techniques in this book say they really do work. However, the techniques require more planning and discipline than many people will be willing to put up with. But if you are someone who is completely debilitated by jet lag, this may provide an answer.

Affordable jet travel has opened up the entire world to adventurous divers. And those of us who yearn to experience the wildest, most pristine sites often must fly halfway around the world to get there. People sometimes ask me why I go to such extremes just to see fish. I just smile and head toward the plane, with my regulator bag in one hand and my neck pillow in the other.

Questions for Dr. Shelanski should be addressed to RSD, Dive Medicine, 6600 Abercorn St., Suite 208, Savannah, GA 31405; e-mail: RSDmgzn@aol.com.

PILLOW TALK: 8 WAYS TO BEAT JET LAG

1. Get a good night's rest before traveling.
2. Book a window seat to avoid aisle traffic, or a middle seat at the rear of a wide-body so you can stretch out across the row if the flight isn't full. Also, see if seats next to emergency exits are taken.
3. Exercise at regular intervals in-flight.
4. Stay well hydrated—eight ounces of water for every hour in flight.
5. Avoid alcohol and caffeine.
6. Carry an in-flight travel kit that includes items to help you sleep: inflatable neck pillow, eye shade, earplugs, melatonin, etc.
7. Take sleep medications with caution and only after consulting your physician.
8. Get help. If you're especially susceptible to jet lag, consult the diet and sleep schedules in *Overcoming Jet Lag* by Ehret and Scanlon or call the world's only jet-lag store: the Daniele Ryman Boutique in London's Park Lane Hotel (011-44-171-753-6708).

CIRCLE NO. 89 ON READER SERVICE CARD

TEST YOUR REEF I.Q.

A MARINE LIFE IDENTIFICATION QUIZ by Reef Environmental Education Foundation



1. Species: _____
Family: _____



2. Species: _____
Family: _____



5. Species: _____
Family: _____



8. Species: _____
Family: _____

Caribbean Reef Fishes

During a reef dive in the Caribbean you are typically surrounded by more than a hundred species of fish. Your dive will be greatly enhanced if you learn to identify the fish that you swim with. Below are 10 commonly sighted species. Give yourself 6 points for each correct species name, and 4 points for each correct family name. The answers and an **Expertise Scale** are located on the back of this page. Good luck.



3. Species: _____
Family: _____



4. Species: _____
Family: _____



6. Species: _____
Family: _____



7. Species: _____
Family: _____



9. Species: _____
Family: _____



10. Species: _____
Family: _____

PHOTOS BY PAUL HUMANN AND NED DELOACH

ANSWERS

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. tiger grouper
<i>sea bass family</i> | 6. spotted moray
<i>moray family</i> |
| 2. midnight parrotfish
<i>parrotfish family</i> | 7. schoolmaster
<i>snapper family</i> |
| 3. coney
<i>sea bass family</i> | 8. hogfish
<i>wrasse family</i> |
| 4. permit
<i>jack family</i> | 9. bluestriped grunt
<i>grunt family</i> |
| 5. foureye butterflyfish
<i>butterflyfish family</i> | 10. spotted drum
<i>drum family</i> |

EXPERTISE SCALE

0-30 You need to hit the I.D. books

31-60 Reef pro

61-80 You probably know more than your dive instructor

81-100 Doctor of ichthyology

Identification Tips

1. Members of the sea bass family typically have heavy, robust bodies and large lips. They vary in size from the giant jewfish to the three-inch chalk bass. The family includes all the groupers, plus basslets, hamlets and soapfishes.

5. It is much easier to remember a species' common name if its name is derived from its distinctive features. For example, the foureye butterflyfish has two false eye spots and two real eyes—four eyes.

6. Often, new divers are surprised to learn that morays are fish. Their habit of opening and closing their mouths is necessary to move water through their gills for respiration.

8. Most divers are familiar with the hogfish, but few realize that the three hogfish species in the Caribbean are members of the wrasse family.

10. Three members of the drum family, the spotted drum, jackknifefish and highhat, are commonly confused because of their similar markings, behavior, and habitat; however, only the spotted drum has spots.



REEF ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION FOUNDATION

Fish watching adds a new dimension to diving for today's environmentally conscious underwater explorers. When you begin to learn the names of fish species, you are suddenly transformed from an underwater sightseer to an underwater naturalist. Armed with knowledge and a sophisticated eye, even small coral heads reveal big surprises.

We are all aware that the world's coral reefs are under serious threat, and need safekeeping. Cataloging and monitoring marine wildlife are fundamental to preservation efforts. The Reef Environmental Education Foundation, a nonprofit organization chartered in 1991, was established to involve recreational divers in this important mission. In just five years, REEF has trained over 3,000 volunteer survey divers. This dedicated group has already logged more than 12,000 underwater hours, surveying 900 reef sites in the waters of Florida, the Caribbean, the Bahamas, and the Gulf of Mexico. During the same period, REEF, in partnership with The Nature Conservancy, funded and developed the first comprehensive database program to compile and produce detailed reef fish inventory reports for environmental, scientific and marine life management concerns.

To continue expanding our programs, REEF needs additional survey and contributing members. At this early stage even beginning fish watchers can make significant contributions. Unlike most environmental organizations, REEF does not require dues for membership. However, we do need additional financial support as, more and more, scientists and marine sanctuary managers rely on our ever-growing database. Please help us protect our remaining marine wildlife wilderness. Join REEF today.

To become a Survey Member (free) or
Contributing Member (\$30), contact REEF (305) 451-0312
REEF Headquarters, P.O. Box 246, Key Largo, FL 33037
<http://www.reef.org>

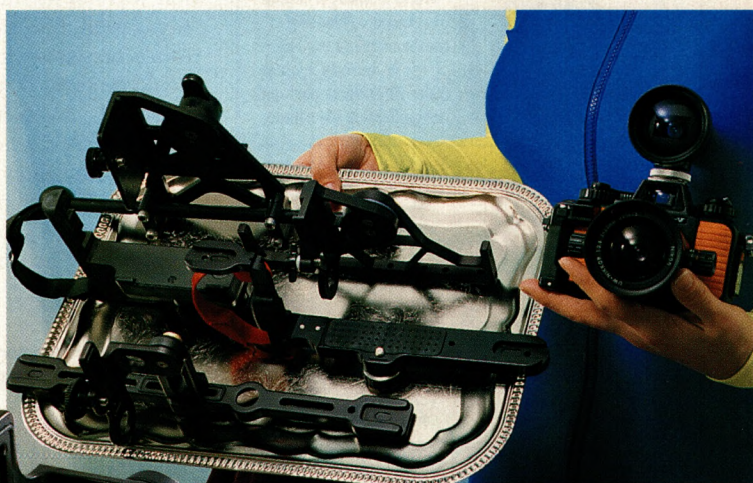


Swivel Trays

Twist and shoot: these unique trays give your camera more flexibility than Gumby.

► Text & photography by **FRANKLIN VIOLA**

Ever get your strobes in position for a horizontal shot, then look through the camera viewfinder and realize the subject composes better as a vertical? Three new swivel trays have solved this problem by allowing the photographer to rotate the camera 90 degrees into either a horizontal or vertical format with a fast and simple manual procedure. You won't miss a beat next time a horizontal stingray scares away that vertical trumpetfish you were about to shoot.



FLIP TRAY

AQUATICA/TECHNICAL LIGHTING CONTROL

Model: 17588 for Nikonos II, III, IV and V. Sugg. Retail: \$287.

Model: 17589 for Nikonos RS. Sugg. Retail: \$341. Distributed

By: Nikon Inc., (800) NIKON-US.

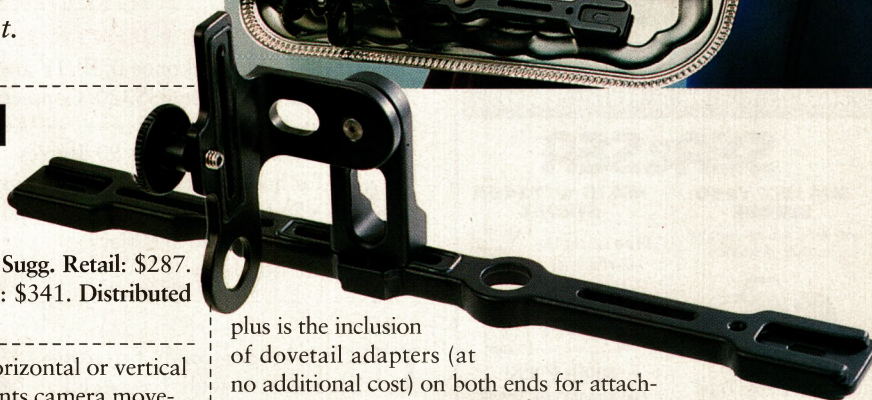


Pros ► Rotates 90 degrees for horizontal or vertical framing • O-ring friction pad prevents camera movement • Includes two dovetail strobe arm adapters • Aluminum-machined and black anodized for durability



Cons ► Camera must be removed for each film change • Rotation assembly susceptible to grit and sand

The Flip Tray from A/TLC rotates smoothly and locks into place when rotated into horizontal or vertical position. We found the release button easy to access even for photographers with small hands. An O-ring friction pad on the tray helps secure the camera and prevents it from twisting out of position. A big



plus is the inclusion of dovetail adapters (at no additional cost) on both ends for attaching dual strobes. However, these additions greatly increase the Flip Tray's overall base length, making it more cumbersome for macro photography. The biggest drawback to A/TLC's Flip Tray is that the camera must be removed to change film.

We did find a manufacturing flaw that could cause some frustration if you are trying to attach a Nikonos II or III camera to the tray. On the two A/TLC Flip Trays we received for testing, the camera mounting bolt screwed easily into the II and III hole; however, the bolt did not slide along the groove. Therefore, we could not center a Nikonos II or III properly on the Flip Tray in order to attach a strobe synch cord.

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ROTATING TRAY

OCEAN BRITE SYSTEMS

Model: OBRNT for Nikonos IV and V; Sea & Sea Motor Marine II and II-EX. Sugg. Retail: \$150. Model: OBRST for Nikonos RS. Sugg. Retail: \$199. Contact: (800) 549-4861.



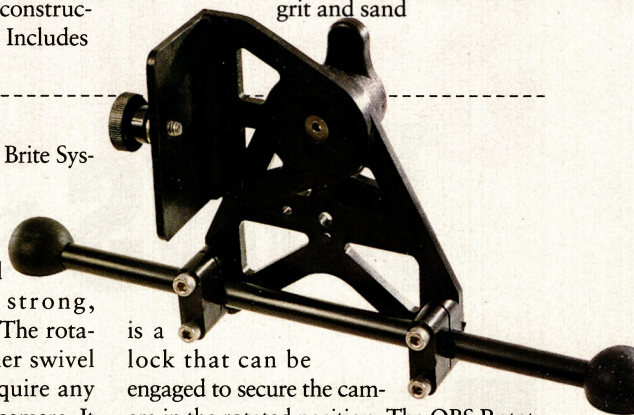
Pros ▶ Rotates 90 degrees for horizontal or vertical framing • Rotation does not require push-button release • Verton molded construction is light and corrosion-free • Includes dual ball-joint strobe arm base



Cons ▶ Camera must be removed for each film change • Rotation assembly susceptible to grit and sand

Like their strobe arms, Ocean Brite Systems' Rotating Tray is made from injection-molded Verton (a high tech composite of fiberglass and nylon). We found OBS's Verton Tray to be strong, lightweight and corrosion-free. The rotation was not as smooth as other swivel trays tested, but it does not require any release mechanism to swivel the camera. It should be noted that OBS's Rotating Tray can swivel a complete 360 degrees, versus the other trays' 90 degrees. The tray can be rotated by either gripping the camera or using the large knob on the back of the tray. The large knob provides a good grip when diving with mitts or gloves. There

is a lock that can be engaged to secure the camera in the rotated position. The OBS Rotating Tray base is actually an OBS Double Ball Arm. The Nikonos III, IV and V trays come standard with a 12-inch double-ball arm (arm lengths from five to 20 inches can be substituted when ordering). This is a big plus when attaching dual strobes with the OBS arm systems.



PIVOT TRAY

ULTRA LIGHT CONTROL SYSTEMS

Model: CP-NK for Nikonos II, III, IV and V. Sugg. Retail: \$200. Model: CP-RS for Nikonos RS. Sugg. Retail: \$220. Contact: (800) 635-6611.



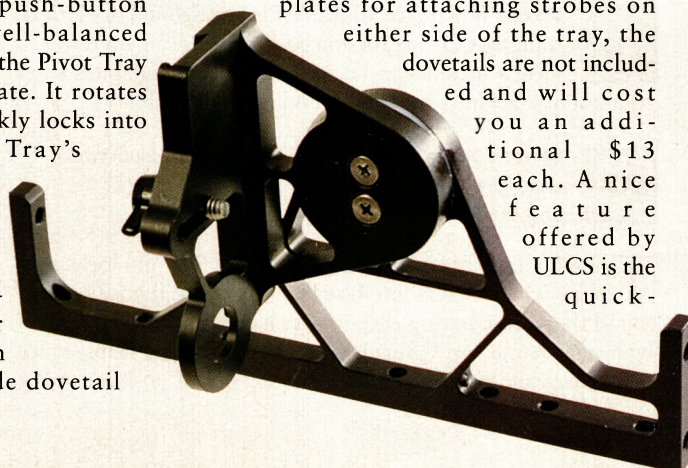
Pros ▶ Rotates 90 degrees for horizontal or vertical framing • Smoothest push-button release • Aluminum-machined and black anodized for durability



Cons ▶ Camera must be removed for each film change • Rotation assembly susceptible to grit and sand

ULCS's larger push-button release and well-balanced camera tray makes the Pivot Tray the easiest to operate. It rotates smoothly and quickly locks into place. The Pivot Tray's compact, reinforced design can support both macro and wide-angle strobe setups without any shaking or movement. Although ULCS does provide dovetail

plates for attaching strobes on either side of the tray, the dovetails are not included and will cost you an additional \$13 each. A nice feature offered by ULCS is the quick-



EDITOR'S CHOICE

Shooting macro or wide-angle images with dual strobes, the best choice would be the **Pivot Tray** from **Ultra Light Control Systems**. It had the smoothest push-button releases and most compact, durable design of the swivel trays. However, if swimming with big animals (whales, dolphins and sharks) and shooting without strobes, **Ikelite's N5 Tray** provides a better grip and more comfort.

release handle topped with a ball-joint (\$80 with base adapter) which can be mounted on the left or right. Again, the biggest drawback to this swivel tray system is the fact that you have to remove the camera to change film.

Standard Trays

Although the following camera trays do not swivel, they have the advantage of a compact, lightweight design.

N5 TRAY & HANDLE

IKELITE UNDERWATER SYSTEMS

Model: 4095 for Nikonos V. Sugg. Retail: \$50. Contact: (317) 923-4523.



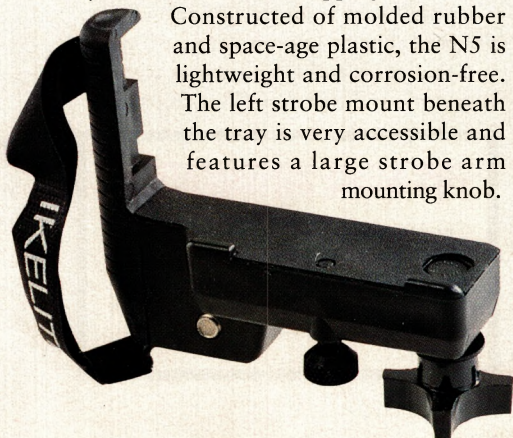
Pros ► Compact and form-fitting • Rubber-armored, space-age plastic construction • Rapid advance camera lever included



Cons ► Dual strobe mount is awkward • Cannot be used with Nikonos II, III or IV

While other manufacturers offer a standard single tray, Ikelite's N5 Tray is the most compact and form-fitting. Resembling a motor-drive, the N5's palm handle provides more surface area to the body of the Nikonos V camera, making it more comfortable to grip. The velcro strap on the palm handle allows you to relax your hand without dropping the camera.

Constructed of molded rubber and space-age plastic, the N5 is lightweight and corrosion-free. The left strobe mount beneath the tray is very accessible and features a large strobe arm mounting knob.



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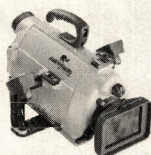
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We did find the N5's rear mount for utilizing dual strobes to be somewhat awkward. Included with Ikelite's N5 tray is a Rapid Advance that installs over the Nikonos V film advance lever for fast and easy film advancing with your thumb.



INFINITY TRAY

LIGHT & MOTION INDUSTRIES

Model: 854-0009 for Nikonos V. Sugg.
Retail: \$99. Contact: (408) 645-1525.



Pros ▶ Aluminum-machined and black anodized for durability • Rubber friction pad prevents camera movement • Includes two dovetail strobe arm adaptors



Cons ▶ Handle not form-fitted to camera • Cannot be used with Nikonos II, III or IV

We found the Infinity Tray from Light & Motion Industries to be simple and durable. While not as form-fitting or comfortable as Ikelite's N5 Tray, the Infinity Tray's wraparound hand design and rubber palm grip is just as functional. The tray includes a nylon wrist strap for reducing fatigue and adding an element of security. However, the strap leaves excess length dangling once you have adjusted it to fit your hand.

Besides being compatible with their own arms, LMI's Infinity Tray features dual dovetail strobe arm attachments so you can also use other manufacturers' arms.

Field editor Franklin J. Viola lives in Atlanta, Ga. Next month: "A Beginner's Guide to Underwater Videography."

THE FLORIDA KEYS

(Continued from page 46)

Upper Keys or Key West. Several hotels have dive shops on their property (or vice versa), which makes for convenient, roll-out-of-bed diving. Again, a boat and bed package can save money on both ends.

You'll Love ▶

Walking, biking, roller-blading, fishing or just standing still with a frosty beverage on the old Seven Mile Bridge.

Bahia Honda State Park—a rare sand beach in the Keys and a good spot to rent a kayak to explore the mangrove shallows.

Above Seven Mile Bridge ▶

Bars • Angler's Bar—upstairs at the Faro Blanco Resort, MM 48, is the après dive site. Mangrove Mamas at MM 20 for Reggae Sunday (in season) and Coconuts after the other bars close for the night.

Food • 7 Mile Grill at the top of the bridge is a funky old shack serving good Keys fare: fritters, fish and chowder.

Below Seven Mile Bridge ▶

Bar • Outside Bar at Looe Key Reef Resort, MM 27. Good lunches: burgers, fish sandwiches.

Food • Monte's Restaurant & Fish Market, MM 25. Screen walls, ceiling fans and fresh local seafood.

Key West

In 1513, Ponce de León was looking for the Fountain of Youth but found Key West. He named the island *Cayo Hueso* meaning "Key Wacko." Apparently he landed during the annual Halloween Fantasy Fest.

Key West is exactly the town you'd expect if you knew first that *hueso* actually means bones—*Island of Bones*—and that after Ponce came Blackbeard, Captain Kidd and Seasick Eddy the Fair-weather Pirate and that after the pirates came the Navy and then the wreckers who stalked their rooftop walks waiting for hapless ships to run afoul the reefs and after them the spongers and cigar makers and that the city burned down twice and went from the nation's richest city per capita to poorest within 50 years and that tourism began here as welfare busywork and that Key West ships have

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on diving in the Florida Keys and the rest of Florida from Panama City to Miami and from the inland springs to Crystal River, see the RSD web site at: www.scubadiving.com.

CIRCLE NO. 101 ON READER SERVICE CARD

THE SEASHELL THAT ROARED

Keys residents have a long and celebrated history of being laid-back and rejecting outside interference. In April 1982, in order to protest anti-drug, anti-illegal immigrant (anti-tourist and pro-traffic jam) roadblocks set up by the federal government on U.S. 1, Key West seceded from the Union, formed the Conch Republic and immediately requested foreign aid. The anniversary is celebrated every year and the Conch Republic is still a sovereign country to romantics and those who've yet to sober up.

drugs, Cubans and shrimp as the market would bear and that the town seceded from the United States in 1982.

Key West today is a free-for-all, hey sailor, touristy T-shirt shop, Hemingway and Buffet kinda town with wonderful old houses, rusty beach bikes and just enough people hanging around talking to themselves to keep it interesting—it's the perfect place to be at the end of the line.

Key West Diving ►

Key West has so many topside diversions and perversions that diving has traditionally been an afterthought compared to the other Keys' diver-direct tourism. One exception has been the technical deep diving on sites like the *Wilkes Barre*. For the general sport diver, Key West shops and boats are good: one operator has even brought in a speedy triple jet for quick runs to offshore sites. Dives range from shallow stands of elkhorn to the wall off the deep reef at 100 feet-plus and a great collection of wrecks: easy to ultra. Outside reefs commonly have the Gulf Stream's great vis but the green of the Gulf of Mexico can push over shallower sites when the wind and outgoing tide conspire.

Key West is one area where, because of the excellent dives in slightly deeper water, divers should control the boat's destination and not snorkelers.

Accommodations ►

Key West is the most expensive town in the Keys. There are hotels outside the

city center where you can get a room under \$100 in the winter, but you'll have to drive to town and parking can be nearly impossible. Rates reach \$500 a night on the sunset waterfront and bounce between there and \$100 in town. A bed and breakfast makes for an interesting alternative. There are quite a few set up in great old houses scattered throughout the historic district where two people can get a room with a story and a good breakfast for under \$150 per night in season and be within walking distance of everything. Unless you want to relive your dorm days, book a room with a private bath. One free local service that will track down vacancies at B&B's or hotels is Accommodation Finder at (888) 453-9937.

You'll Love ►

Food • B.O.'s—its name is unappetizing and its decor is early shipwreck: flotsam with a touch of jetsam. It's marked by a rusty pickup driven by a moldy, big-headed stuffed something. But you'll get the best fish sandwiches, burgers and key-limeade in town to munch outside in the tiki shade. Corner of William and Caroline.

Bars • The usual suspects are still going strong: Sloppy's and Rick's on Duval, Hog's Breath around the corner. Deadheads and chemical commandos hang at Barefoot Bob's on Duval. Or you can find your own crowd at one of the other 150 bars in town.

Seafood • Local divers trek off-island to the next landmass east, Stock Island, to eat at the Rusty Anchor. Today's special is whatever the boat's brought in. Some of the best conch chowder this reporter's ever slurped: chunky and spicy.

Diversions • Sunset Circus at Mallory Square or the decks of the bayside hotels.

Shopping • Bird in the Hand is the best store I've seen for crafts inspired by the sea.

T-shirts • Try to get out of town without buying one. (My favorite: One tequila, two tequila, three tequila, floor.)

PAPA'S HOUSE AND FAVORITE BAR

It is a good house made of limestone on good ground with many six-toed cats afoot that stalk lizards around the clean, well-wetted pool that was the first in Key West and cost five times the price of the house plus one marriage.

Key West was one of Hemingway's Islands in the Stream and his house at 907 Whitehead St. is well worth a short, happy visit. From 1933-37 Captain Tony's was owned by "Sloppy Joe" Russell. He was a great friend of Hemingway and Ernest drank here and met another wife. Joe moved the bar to its present Duval St. locale when his landlord tried to raise the rent. Hemingway followed Joe and drank on Duval for a couple more years before moving south to Cuba.

IKELITE Aquashot PHOTO CONTEST

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AQUASHOT II

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The Aquashot II is Ikelite's waterproof housing for the 35mm single-use, Kodak, Fuji and AquaSnap 27-exposure cameras. This inexpensive system is ideal for diving and snorkeling. The results are sharp, colorful photos rivaling those taken by the expensive underwater cameras. Use the flash version cameras to bring out all the vivid colors. The Aquashot II housing operates to 125 feet.

With the film's fine grain, you get beautiful color prints and enlargements.

Accessories include Macro Kit, Strobe & Travel Bag.



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Available at your local Dive Shop.

No need to worry where to buy cameras for the Aquashot II housing. Ikelite offers a disposable camera for use above water or in the housing. The AquaSnap camera features built-in flash and 27-exposure film which can be processed locally.

Be sure to stock up on AquaSnap cameras before your next dive trip.

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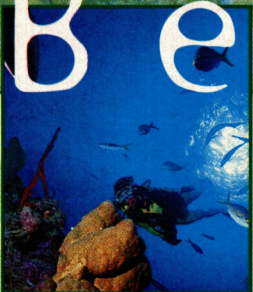


PHOTOS: DOUG PERRINE/INNERSPACE VISIONS

Belize serves up a universe of diving experiences: 170 miles of

barrier reef, three coral atolls and hundreds of off-shore islands and cayes.

Dive the famous Great Blue Hole and you get one picture of Belize. Explore the shallow reefs of Hol Chan Marine Reserve and get a different image. Frolic with dolphins within sight of a live-aboard and get yet another. Every time you're tempted to think that today's experience is the essence of Belize diving, tomorrow's will change your mind.



One small country,
a world of dive destinations.

-by Rob Curran



The Belize Barrier Reef

The most striking feature of offshore Belize is its barrier reef, which stretches from Ambergris Caye in the north to the Sapodilla Cayes and the Bay of Honduras in the south. Hundreds of cayes dot the barrier reef inside and outside the line. Divers have two options for exploring sections of the barrier reef: live-aboards and the dive resorts on the cayes that offer day and overnight boat trips. Barrier reef diving offers a stunning variety of undersea terrain: walls, drop-offs, tunnels, swim-throughs, spur-and-groove formations, and shallow coral gardens. Pack a marine ID book; you'll find a dazzling array of exotic sponges, corals and critters, including reef tropicals, schooling and pelagic fish, turtles, eagle and manta rays, nurse sharks, pods of dolphins, even whale sharks.

Ambergris Caye

Ambergris Caye is the largest of the 200 cayes dotting offshore Belize. Only a half-mile from the barrier reef, Ambergris is a premier destination for scuba divers and snorkelers. San Pedro Town—barely a mile long and a few blocks wide—is a major attraction. The streets are sand: locals and visitors stroll around barefoot or tool about in electric golf carts. Ambergris Caye is a friendly, laid-back island with many options for visitors: resorts, restaurants, nightlife, discos and shopping.

Ambergris Caye is home to a score of dive operators and dedicated diving resorts. The basic San Pedro dive boat is a 20- to 26-foot island-built skiff by twin outboards. The skiffs speed to most dive sites in under 20 minutes. Most dives are made outside the reef in spur-and-groove canyons at depths ranging from 40 to 100 feet.

A popular destination is Hol Chan Marine Reserve where the ocean floor ranges from five to 35 feet. The reserve focuses on the Hol Chan (Mayan for "little channel") cut in the barrier reef. The five-square-mile area features three distinct yet interdependent zones: the reef (both inside and outside), seagrass beds behind the reef, and the mangroves of southern Ambergris Caye. For divers and

snorkelers, it is like an underwater aquarium loaded with colorful tropical fish and beautiful coral formations.

The cut leading out to sea functions as a "fish freeway" for large species, including giant groupers, barracuda and nurse sharks. Divers often enjoy close encounters with sea turtles. Hol Chan is a paradise for underwater photographers.

The Atolls

Many consider the three huge atolls—Turneffe, Lighthouse Reef and Glover's—the crown jewels of Belize diving. There are often hundreds of shallow patch reefs in the lagoons with calm, protected waters—perfect for snorkeling. Just seaward of the coral rings, walls—some of the most



pristine in the Caribbean—plummet to astounding depths. Clear waters wash the walls for outstanding color and visibility—80 to 200 feet—the best in Belize. Here, too, is a rich mixture of pelagic and reef life.

For the most part, the atolls are the province of live-aboards and a handful of dive resorts located on the atolls. From Ambergris Caye, however, some dive operators run day and overnight trips to Turneffe, Lighthouse and the Great Blue Hole. Some day boats and overnights visit the atolls from dive operations based on the cayes along the barrier reef and from coastal Belize.

Each atoll is distinct. Turneffe Islands is the largest and closest to shore. Its forest of mangroves is the key link in the food chain and makes for an explosion of marine life on the 70 dive sites.

Lighthouse Reef is slightly smaller than Turneffe. The atoll's southern end forms a crescent five miles in

diameter. Set at the eastern end is famous Half Moon Caye, an island paradise. More than 40 dive sites surround Lighthouse Reef, which some contend should get the "best in Belize" title. Belize's most famous and unusual dive site punctuates the center of Lighthouse. Visible from spacecraft orbiting the earth, the Great Blue Hole is the largest ocean sinkhole in the world. At 110 feet, huge stalactites—some 40 feet long and 10 feet in diameter—leave divers awestruck.

Glover's Reef is the least visited of the three atolls—wilderness diving at its best. Above water, a few coconut-crowded islets interrupt ocean and sky. Below the panoramic sea are more reefs than a diver could see in a lifetime, many world-class.

Belize City and South Placencia

Divers visiting Belize usually pass through Belize City, a rustic

Caribbean port town and the country's transportation hub. Several of the world's best live-aboards operate weekly from the docks, primarily to two or three of the coral atolls. Many visitors use Belize City as a base for day dive trips or for sorties into the Belize interior.

A hundred miles south of Belize City, a spit of land meanders into the Caribbean, creating a peninsula where diving and lounging on the beach can become obsessions. Placencia is a stretched-out, laid-back town that occupies a 15-mile stretch of white sand. Laughing Bird, Ranguana, Tarpum and the Silk Cayes are among nearly 40 spots that dive operators visit. Placencia boasts some of the most diversified diving in Belize: shallow coral gardens, spur-and-groove formations, barrier reef, drop-offs, patch reef, nearby Glover's Atoll, and reefs that fringe the cayes.

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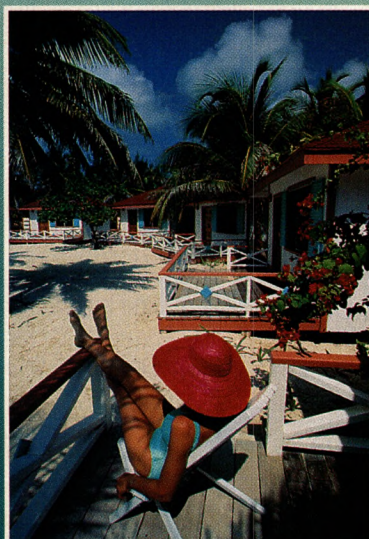
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"No shoes, no shirt, no problem." That's the motto of this casual hotel conveniently located by the airstrip in downtown San Pedro. SunBreeze Hotel's on-site dive shop offers complete diving services from local barrier reef diving to offshore trips to Belize's famed Blue Hole, Lighthouse Reef and Turneffe Islands. Ask about their two Summer '97 packages ranging from \$529 to \$636 p.p./d.o. 800-938-0860, fax: 954-772-0737, e-mail: sunbreeze@btl.net, Web site: wwwbelizeit.com.sunbreeze

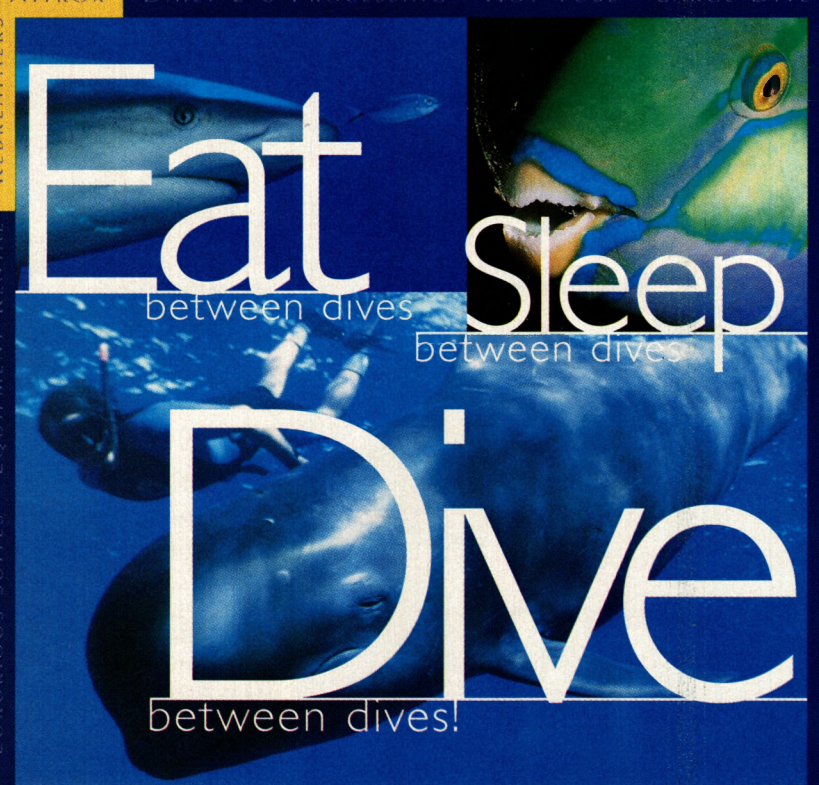
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BZ Travel offers the Belize dive traveler 20 years of experience diving and traveling to Belize. They can tell you where to find the highest quality and best values for diving, hotels, lodges, live-aboards and Belize adventures. BZ Travel can arrange a complete travel package with airfare from any city and with any hotel in Belize. Discount airfare is available from most cities on TACA, American and Continental Airlines. Diving services are provided by Bottom Time Dive Shop located on Ambergris Cay and Belize Diving Services on Caye Caulker. These excellent dive operators offer scuba courses, scuba rental equipment, barrier reef and outer atoll diving. They are always happy to work with your diving level and interests. They have friendly, experienced staffs and offer small group diving. Ask BZ Travel about their special group dive packages for 12 or more divers. Call 800-382-7776, fax 281-337-1168, e-mail: bztravel@compansnet.com, Web site: www.compassnet.com/bztravel.

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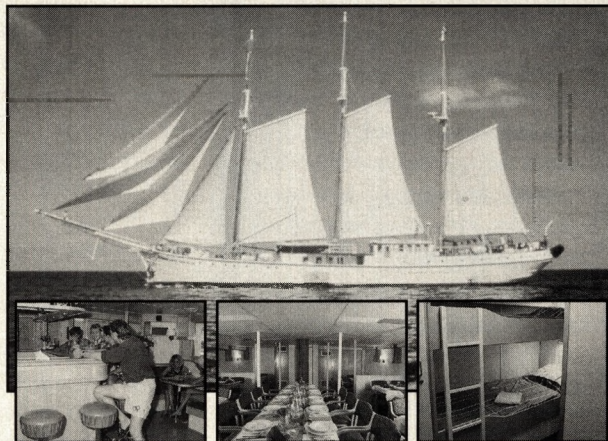
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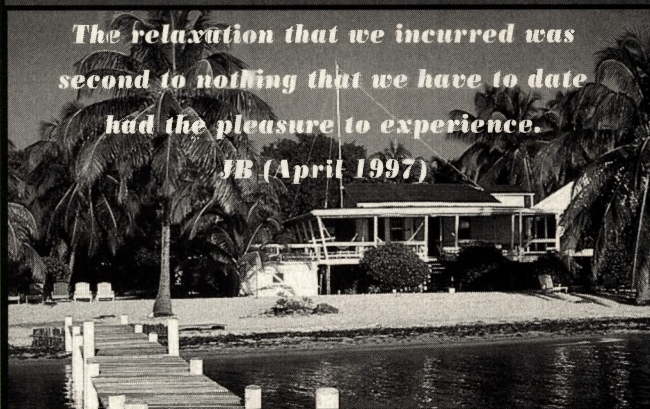
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Maya Tours' combination packages offer dive vacation diversions. The Reef and Rainforest package combines three days of exploring the Maya ruins and rainforests with four days on Ambergris for as little as \$820 p.p./d.o. Caribbean Air's new direct service to Roatan from Belize allows for easy Belize/Bay Islands combos, too! Ask about an all-inclusive week at Blackbird Caye Resort for \$995 or the Blue Hole Extravaganza for \$850. 800-392-

6292, fax: 561-477-4879, e-mail: info@mayatour.com, Web site: http://mayatour.com

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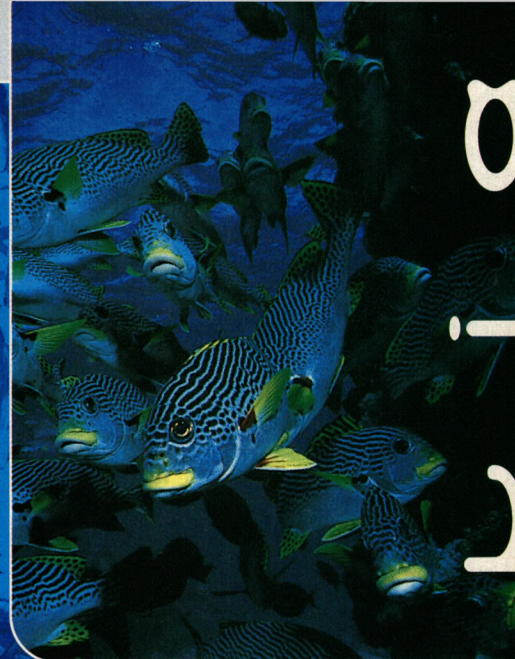
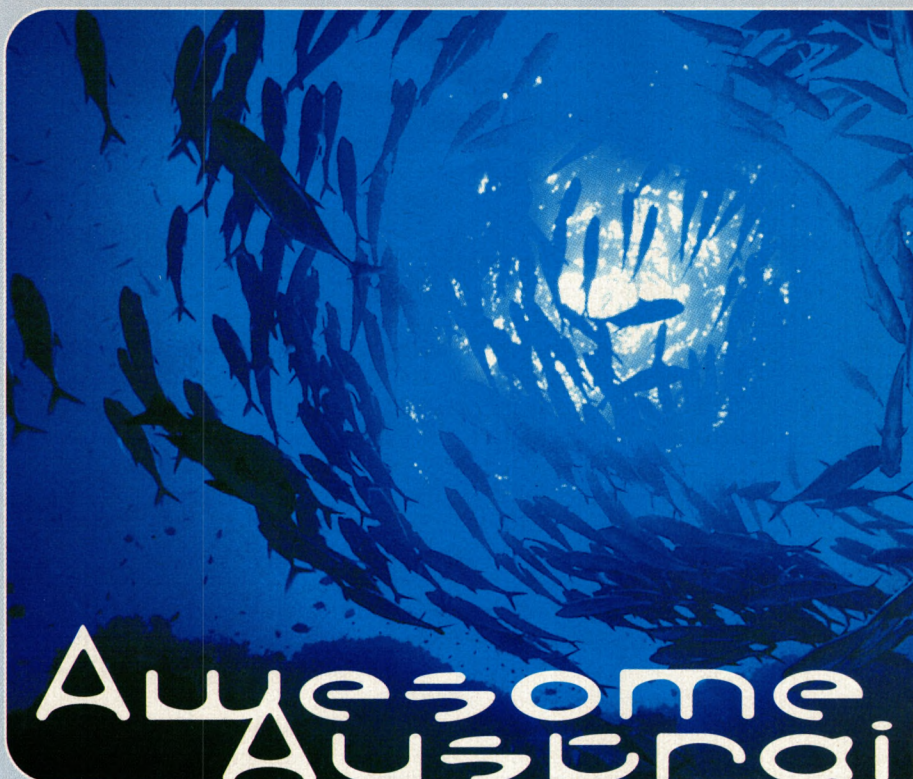
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Awesome Australia

- by Rob Curran

Australia ranks in the top five destinations on the globe for scuba diving. No wonder. In the 1997 *Rodale's Scuba Diving Readers' Choice Awards*, the island continent scored in the Indo-Pacific's top five in 10 categories: fish life, big animals, health of marine environment, walls, wrecks, snorkeling, underwater photography, beginner diving, advanced diving and value.

Divers from North America often think of Australia as a single destination. But there's more to it than the Great Barrier Reef. Australia is a huge continent ringed by an enormous amount of underwater territory—explored and unexplored. And the Coral Sea—with its consistently crystalline waters and lush reef systems—is a day's boat run due east from the central section of the reef.

With great stretches of water to cross, it's no surprise that live-aboard boats remain one of the most popular options for divers. Australian vessels range from 10-berth motor sailers to 30-passenger luxury cruisers. But along the Queensland coast, resort islands, mainland resorts, day boats, jungle lodges, campgrounds and motels cater to even the most single-minded scuba addicts.

The Great Barrier Reef

The Great Barrier Reef is the biggest structure made by living organisms on earth. It's 1,200 miles of coral ramparts, islets and cays that flank the northeast coast of Australia. Of the hundreds of islands that dot the reef area, about 20 have resort facilities. Although it covers a huge area—133,000 square miles—the reef environment is extremely fragile. Without its colorful and highly varied life, the Great Barrier Reef would be no more than a great breakwater.

The Great Barrier Reef from North to South

For reference, divers divide the reef into sections. Working from north to south, the Torres Strait separates Australia from Papua New Guinea. It contains a scattering of islands that run like stepping stones from PNG to the northeastern tip of Cape York. The Torres Strait is the province of live-aboard dive boats—there are no resort islands.

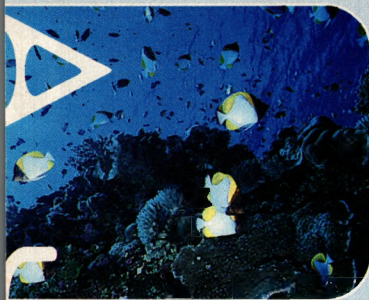
Next comes the Far Northern Section (a.k.a. the tropical northern reef). It runs from the eastern tip of Cape York—the most northerly point in Queensland—south to Cairns. Seclusion is the name of the game on Lizard Island, a large national park. It offers fine diving—it's only 10 miles from the

outer edge of the reef. Near Lizard Island is Cod Hole, world renowned for its tame sea monsters—the giant potato cod. Divers enjoy hand-feeding these friendly creatures, some of which grow to eight feet in length.

The Central Reef begins near Cairns at Mission Beach and runs south to Bowen, which is located at the northern end of the Whitsunday island group. This section of the reef is littered with shipwrecks, including the *S.S. Yongala*, one of the best wreck dives in the world.

The 70 islands of the Whitsunday group are the best known and most developed of the Barrier Reef islands. They scatter over both sides of the Whitsunday Passage, 30 miles from the mainland and six miles from the reef. All but five islands are national parks. Many have fine systems of fringing reefs. The islands are home to a wide range of wildlife, including goannas, possums, rock wallabies and 156 species of birds.

The Southern Reef covers the stretch from the Whitsundays to Bundaberg; it includes the Capricorn Runker Group and the Swains Reef complex. Heron Island is one of the most popular destinations for divers on the Great Barrier Reef. It is a tiny coral cay which rises



only nine feet above sea level. Visitors come to this national park island almost exclusively for its nine square miles of reef, which

harbor a vast variety of marine life.

Southeast Queensland runs from Hervey Bay to the border with New South Wales near Brisbane. Diving is the main form of entertainment on Lady Elliot Island. The no-frills coral cay resort is popular with the scuba crowd thanks to numerous shipwrecks. Scuba divers can dive straight off the beach. Underwater visibility is good and the coral excellent. A shore walk at low-tide offers access to the reef and its rays, crabs, octopus, eels and even parrotfish.

For divers, the Great Barrier Reef's lure is encounters with the countless colorful, exotic and bizarre sea creatures that thrive there. Dwelling among the coral are 2,000 species of fish—from tiny gobies to whale sharks. Their colors and shapes are fantastic. Coral is healthy and prolific. Count dolphins, humpback whales, and dugongs among the area's larger visitors and inhabitants. The region is famous for sharks, so expect to see gray reef sharks along with big nurse sharks and the strange, fringe-headed species known as the wobbegong.

The Coral Sea

The Coral Sea contains the oceanic reefs found outside the Great Barrier Reef. Located 200 miles offshore, this area is worth the trip. Structures can be similar to the Great Barrier Reef, but there are also underwater mountains rising hundreds of fathoms from the sea floor. The attraction is awesome perimeters, deep sloping walls and perpendicular drop-offs, many of them unexplored. The variety of marine animals is astonishing: huge

schools of pelagic fish, sharks, red bass, trevally, black surgeon, large tuna, barracuda, and rainbow runners. Swim with giant turtles, manta rays, and docile whale sharks. The pristine reefs are covered



with an unimaginable variety of colorful soft and hard corals, coral towers, archways, small valleys, domes and spirals. Water clarity is heart-stopping.

For More Information

Contact the Australian Tourist Commission, 2121 Avenue of the Stars, Suite 1200, Los Angeles, CA 90067; (800) 333-0199. Or for more specific information on Queensland, call 847-296-4900.

Mike Ball Dive Expeditions

Since starting business in 1969, Mike Ball has endeavored to show divers Australia's best marine life from the best equipped liveaboard vessels. Mike Ball expeditions are suited to the adventurous diver seeking big fish, deep walls, shark action or wreck diving. His fleet twin hull liveaboards provides less rock-n-roll with more space and



comfort. Itineraries include the Cod Hole, Coral Sea, *Yongala* Wreck, the Great Barrier Reef, and starting in January 1998, Papua New Guinea. 1-888-MIKE BALL or 800-952-4319, fax 520-556-9598, e-mail: OzDive@aol.com, Website: <http://www.mikeball.com>

Nimrod Dive Adventures

Nimrod III is a superb live-aboard dive vessel offering the best diving the Great Barrier Reef has to offer. The boat is stable and comfortable with a spacious lounge and sundeck. Up to 18 divers are accommodated in six cabins, all of which are air-conditioned and contain an ensuite bathroom. *Nimrod III* is a 70-foot catamaran with plenty of room for gearing up. Snorkellers are welcome and are offered a 10% discount. The *Nimrod III* package includes a one-hour scenic flight over the reef to and from Lizard Island. 011-61-70-315-566, fax 011-61-70-312-431

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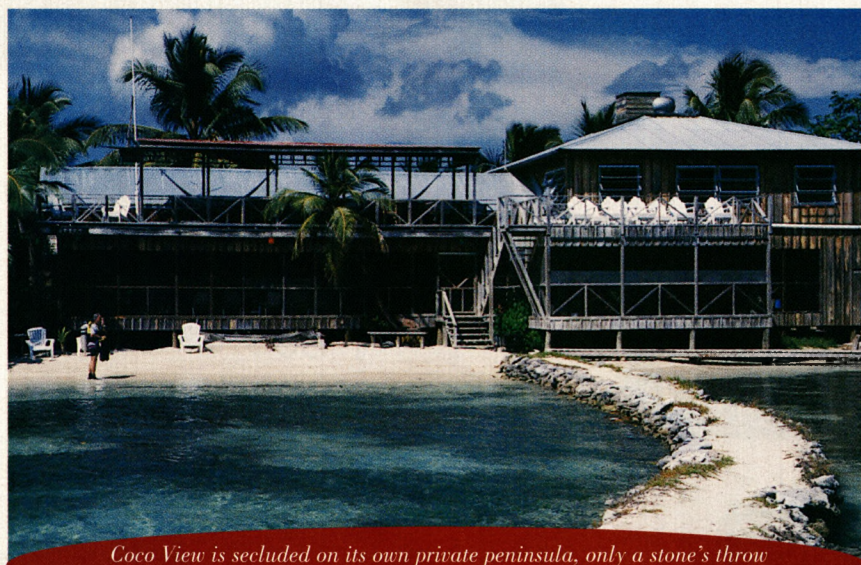
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CoCo View Resort

One Dive Vacation Is Never Enough



Coco View is secluded on its own private peninsula, only a stone's throw from some of the best shore diving in the Caribbean.

In the 1997 *RSD* Readers' Choice Awards, divers ranked CoCo View Resort No. 1 in the world for best dive operator value and 12th for best food. After five vacations at CoCo View, you become a member of the Coconut Club. After nine vacations, your 10th trip—a "Double Coconut"—is free. Nineteen club members enjoyed free trips in 1996. Over a hundred divers are 10-trip veterans. Six members are well on their way to a "Triple Coconut," 15 vacations at CoCo View. These facts raise questions: Does the resort spike the food with something that lures divers back? Why do guests go cuckoo for CoCo View?

Owners Bill and Evelyn Evans and their son Terry have developed a magic recipe. And they cook it up over and over again to the delight of guests. The ingredients are a blend of superb shore and boat diving, comfortable accommodations, tropical atmosphere, laidback organization, attentive service and satisfying meals. One of the key ingredients is CoCo View hospitality. You're welcomed like family in the best Honduran tradition—"mi casa es su casa."

CoCo View is situated on a gem of an islet just off Roatan. The resort's wooden architecture blends with the natural surroundings of the sandy caye. Nine rooms are air-conditioned while the rest of the guest rooms and social areas are cooled by ceiling fans and natural breezes blowing through large screened windows.

DIVE AROUND THE CLOCK

The resort is perched at the corners of two major drop-offs—CoCo View and Newman's walls. Any time of day or night, grab a dive buddy and scuba gear, and jump in. Just kick your fins a few times and you're on the steep drop-offs. With a few more strokes you reach the *Prince Albert*, an intact island freighter with cargo holds, companionways and superstructure to explore and photograph. And remember, in the 1997 *RSD* Readers' Choice Awards, Roatan scored in the Caribbean's top five for shore diving.

If you've got a hankering for boat trips, CoCo View offers one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Step onto a dive boat, and in minutes you arrive at a breathtaking reef or

wall teeming with fish life. After diving, you can rinse and store your gear and shower at the scuba center, right next to the boat docks. Diving doesn't get any more convenient.

For instruction and equipment, stop in at Dockside Dive Center, a PADI 5-Star Facility owned and operated by Patty Grier. The center's brochure lists a line-up of courses from scuba refresher and discover scuba through divemaster, plus 11 specialties. For underwater photo and video equipment and services, see John Haught at Ocean Images, inside Dockside Dive Center.

BOOK IT ► Roatan Charter—experts in travel to Honduras and the Bay Islands—represents CoCo View Resort in North America. Through Sept. 26, 1997, seven-night packages are \$800 per person, double occupancy. From Sept. 27, 1997 to Jan. 23, 1998, seven nights are \$750. Packages include boat and shore diving, meals, accommodations, island transfers and the Honduran hotel tax. Book a 1998 stay during 1997 and pay 1997 rates. Contact Roatan Charter for reservations and convenient air connections. Phone (800) 282-8932 or (352) 588-4131. On the world wide web, go to <http://www.roatan.com>. E-mail: ccv@roatan.com.



Peter Hughes Diving

Diving Papua New Guinea From the *FeBrina* and *Star Dancer*

One trip to Papua New Guinea was enough to hook Peter Hughes. Other divers evidently concur: In the 1997 *Rodale's Scuba Diving Readers' Choice Awards*, visitors voted PNG the number three destination in the Indo-Pacific and top five in a host of categories—fish life, big animals, health of the marine environment, and wall, wreck, shore and advanced diving. After experiencing PNG's underwater wonders in 1995, Peter Hughes decided to share them with fellow divers.

NEW FOR PAPUA NEW GUINEA

In 1996, Hughes acquired a share holding in the *M/V FeBrina*. For years, the 12-passenger liveaboard plied Papua New Guinea's nooks and crannies in casual elegance. The archipelago nation stretches for more than 1,000 miles, and no one knows the hidden treasures of these waters better than Capt. Alan Raabe, who continues to skipper the *FeBrina*. In January 1997, *M/V Star Dancer*—formerly the *Sun Dancer* of Palau—joined *FeBrina* in New Guinea. The 120-foot vessel accommodates 16 divers in classic Peter Hughes' style—a boat that provides divers luxury and comfort.

Walindi Plantation Resort is the home base for both *FeBrina* and *Star Dancer*. Walindi Bay—a world-class dive destination in its own right—is centrally located on the 300-mile north coast of New Britain island.

From Walindi Bay, the boats range north into the Bismarck Sea



to pristine dive sites—both discovered and undiscovered. For divers and underwater photographers, this is an invaluable opportunity to enjoy Papua New Guinea's famed reefs at their best.

On five- to 10-night round-trips, *FeBrina* and *Star Dancer* strike out to an amazing variety of combinations: Inglis Shoal, Kimbe Bay, the Witu Islands, Naroge Island, and Strudles and Fathers Reefs. On 10-night voyages, the liveaboards cruise the waters from Walindi-to-Rabaul and Walindi-



to-Kavieng on one-way trips. Throughout 1997 and 1998, Peter Hughes is offering the range of dive sites north of New Britain in almost every conceivable permutation and

combination. And in 1998, *FeBrina* will include special cruises to the Solomon Sea south of New Britain.

The *FeBrina* and *Star Dancer* are both studies in modern liveaboards: state-of-the-art convenience, comfort, service and luxury amenities. Step aboard and you discover the touches and innovations that are Peter Hughes trademarks: Spacious dive decks with the ultimate in storage,

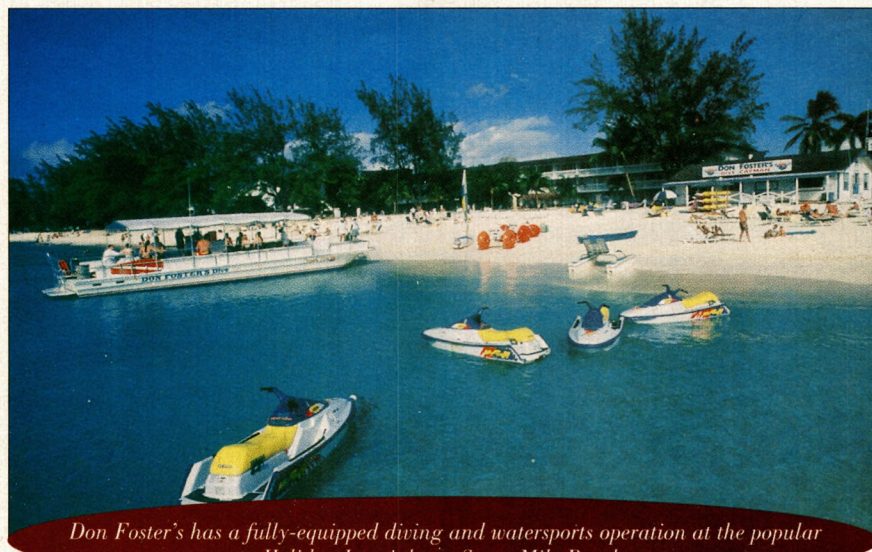
water access and crew service. Fresh-water showers. Mask defogger stations. Water coolers. Conveniences for underwater photography and video: well-equipped labs, editing rooms, light tables, spacious tables on dive decks, and E-6 processing. Warm towels after every dive and daily towel service. Spacious sun-decks. Robes. Spacious cabins, some with picture windows and en suite bathrooms. Elegant dinners, table service and choice of entrées. Morning coffee waiting at your cabin door.

Star Dancer also offers a rigid bar for comfortable safety stops, a "boatique" for necessities and souvenirs, dive gear and photography rentals, opportunities for advanced certification courses and specialties, marine ID slide shows and nightly entertainment.

BOOK IT ▶ For reservations and information, contact Peter Hughes Diving Inc., your dive travel specialist or travel agent. Peter Hughes Diving: phone (800) 9-DANCER (932-6237) or (305) 669-9391. Fax (305) 669-9475. E-mail: dancer@peterhughes.com. Web: www.peterhughes.com.

Don Foster's Dive Cayman

Sizzling Summer Savings For Two



Don Foster's has a fully-equipped diving and watersports operation at the popular Holiday Inn right on Seven Mile Beach.

For 15 years, Don Foster's Dive Cayman has nurtured a reputation for providing world-class scuba services. The Caribbean operation follows a few simple rules to stay on top: Limit the number of divers on each boat. Give each guest the highest-quality personal service. Hire staff members with personality and skill, and give them incentives to stay on. And most important, make the diving safe and fun.

BUDDY UP FOR BIG SAVINGS

Don Foster's is offering sizzling "Buddy Packages," available this summer through Dec. 15, 1997. The specials are for two certified divers. The packages start at \$690 for three nights accommodations and diving; they include choice of the Holiday Inn, Island Pines Resort or Radisson Grand Cayman. Seven-night Buddy Packages range from \$1,480 to \$1,690 for accommodations, five two-tank dives, two one-tank dives, a trip to Stingray City or a night dive, tanks for shore diving, hotel tax and service. Add only \$470 for round-trip flights for two from Miami to Grand Cayman (mid-week travel).

Don Foster's offers two full-service locations for maximum convenience.

The new Foster's headquarters are harborside in Georgetown. If you arrive in Grand Cayman by ship and want to squeeze in some memorable dives on a short stopover, the harborside location is just minutes from the cruise ship terminal.

The second Foster's center is at the Holiday Inn on Seven Mile Beach. There, divers find a scuba and watersports operation equipped with wave-runners, windsurfers, sailboats and other beach toys. Ocean Photo offers a staff of three photo pros, complete photo and video services, custom dive videos, video and camera rentals, daily E-6 processing, print developing and enlargements.

DIVING AND INSTRUCTION FOR EVERY VACATION SCHEDULE

A broad range of dive trips is available at Don Foster's. The daily menu features morning two-tank dives, afternoon one-tank trips to shallow reefs, and afternoon trips to Stingray City. Night dives are scheduled twice a week, and Foster's makes frequent trips to the West Side and North Wall. The downtown location is excellent for shore diving with easy access to the wreck of *The Cali*. The menu for diving instruction is just as broad: daily

introduction to scuba, courses (open-water certification through divemaster), specialties and referrals. Open-water courses begin twice a week to accommodate virtually any vacation schedule. Don Foster's is affiliated with PADI, NAUI, SSI, YMCA and IDEA.

THE FLEET IS IN

Foster's fleet includes four comfortable, diver-friendly, flat-top pontoon boats, each more than 52 feet long. All have freshwater showers, ice chests for soft drinks, photo tables and dry storage units. The fifth boat is *Cayman Wall*, a 42-foot jet drive V-hull capable of whisking divers out to the popular North Wall and Stingray City sites in minutes. Rounding out Foster's dive fleet is the *Emerald Eyes*, a 65-foot luxury party boat used for sunset and dinner cruises as well as private charters.

BOOK IT ► The Don Foster's Reservations Office is staffed by knowledgeable travel specialists who are all certified divers. Phone (800) 83-DIVER or (972) 722-2535 for more information and lowest-cost airline reservations.



Stuart Cove's Dive South Ocean

Where It's Not Just A Dive—It's An Adventure

In getting ready for my trip to Dive South Ocean this year, I knew I would be in for an adventure. I had read about Stuart's Extreme Adventure™ dives and knew that an adrenaline junkie would have a hard time choosing one. The Shark Adventure™, which lets you swim with sharks and get close to the action on a shark feeding dive, was introduced

Force to sink the decommissioned ships and to create new dive sites. When it came time to do the scuttling, the Defense Force asked the president of Ocean Watch (who happens to be Stuart Cove) to assist in selecting locations and in supervising the sinkings.

During the briefing for a dive on the *Edwin Williams*, we were told that all three cutters were originally

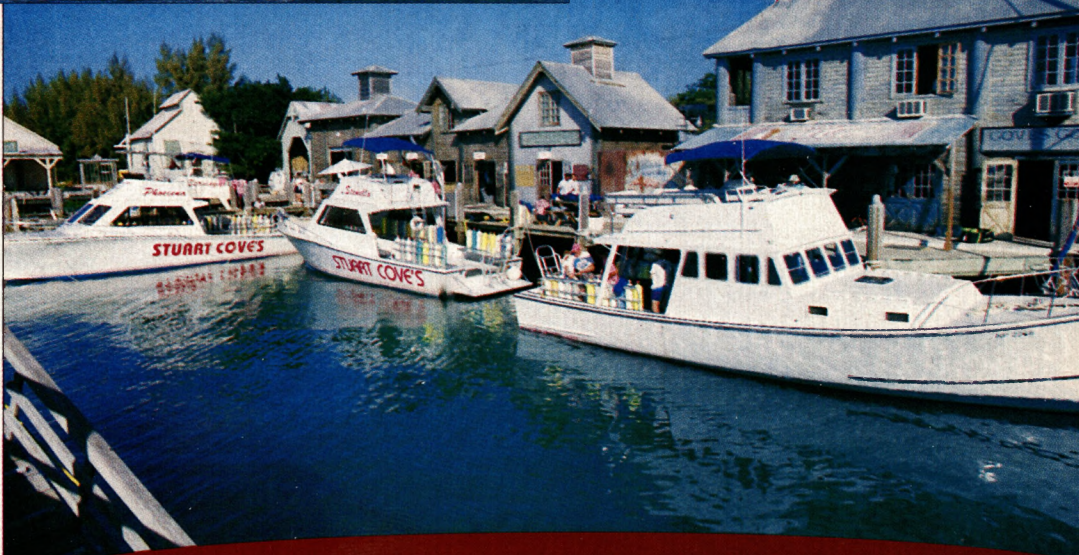
New Providence Island ranked fourth for Caribbean/Atlantic wrecks in the 1997 *Rodale's Scuba Diving Readers' Choice Awards*. With the addition of these three wrecks, it wouldn't be surprising to see that ranking improve next year.

BOOK IT ► A three-night package includes two days of two-tank reef dives at Stuart Cove's. A two-tank reef dive includes a wall dive and either a wreck or a shallow reef. Packages at the South Ocean Golf & Beach resort start at \$327 and packages at the Nassau Marriott start at \$372 per person based on double occupancy. All packages include hotel accommodations, taxes, gratuities, tanks, weights and weight belts. Nassau Marriott packages



first. Last year, the Rebreather Adventure™ was created as an introductory program for recreational divers to understand new rebreather technology and allow them to dive with a rebreather on a reef. New this year is Wall Flying™, where every "pilot" (diver) on the boat has an underwater scooter and goes out on "sorties" (dives) to patrol the Tongue-of-the-Ocean, a 6,000-foot-deep wall a mile offshore from Dive South Ocean.

But what really caught my attention on this trip was the wrecks. During the week I was diving with Dive South Ocean, three 90-foot cutters were sunk. Ocean Watch Bahamas, New Providence Island's marine conservation society, worked with the Bahamian Defense



Three recently-sunk cutters add yet another adventure to Stuart Cove's menu (above). Stuart Cove runs a top-notch dive operation known for its convenience, friendly atmosphere and adventure diving (below).

Force to sink the decommissioned ships and to create new dive sites. When it came time to do the scuttling, the Defense Force asked the president of Ocean Watch (who happens to be Stuart Cove) to assist in selecting locations and in supervising the sinkings.

also include daily round-trip transfers between the dive shop and hotel. Phone Stuart Cove's at (800) 646-3333 and visit their web site at www.stuartcove.com.

Cuan Law

Dive and Sail the BVI in Class and Comfort



DIVING FROM CUAN LAW

The word most often used to describe BVI diving is "variety." Expect excellent wrecks, fringing reefs, coral-encrusted pinnacles, off-shore reefs, ledges, black coral forests, even caverns. Most descents are to 80 feet or less, which makes for long bottom times. The *Cuan Law* log includes more than 100 dive sites, many of them well-hidden and secret.

The *Cuan Law* carries 21' rigid inflatable boats. She can deploy two tenders at a time when small groups of divers and snorkelers want to take off to different locations, while others dive under the mother ship. And in a week of undersea excursions from the *Cuan Law*, no two dives are alike. The yacht

also offers photography and video services and rentals, E-6 processing and a broad range of PADI courses and specialties.

UNMATCHED COMFORT AND SERVICE

Cuan Law is renowned for her excellent food and superb service from an attentive, caring crew. But she is also legendary for outstanding speed and stability. When the yacht moors in four-foot seas, she doesn't rock and roll—she hardly moves at all. On the move, stability is extraordinary because the sails dampen motion.



Guests love the spaciousness and the light, airy feeling throughout the boat. The *Cuan Law* sails with up to 20 passengers booked as groups or individuals.

The 10 staterooms are large, light and airy. Each has an oversized outside window and overhead glass hatch. The cabins feature private bathroom and double beds that convert into single beds (no bunks). Passengers enjoy a choice of natural ventilation or air conditioning.

Meals are varied and interesting, always high-standard and elegantly presented. Menus include European, American, Mexican, English and Caribbean dishes. Dine on teak tables with fine china and sparkling crystal as hanging lanterns set a romantic scene.

MUCH MORE THAN DIVING

The BVI is probably the best place in the world for a boating vacation. *Cuan Law* features a lot of toys and activities to please non-divers and divers who want to enjoy the Caribbean paradise: sailing and racing with two Hobie Cats, three ocean kayaks, water skiing, beach combing, and a beach barbecue in an amazing setting—the world-famous "Baths."

BOOK IT ► *Cuan Law* 6 night / 7 day trips cost \$1,495 per person, double occupancy. For reservations and information phone (800) 648-3393, (809) 494-2490. Fax (809) 494-5774. E-mail: cuanlaw@caribsurf.com or visit <http://www.diveguideint.com/p0370.htm>

A quarter-century ago, Trimarine Boat Company started a quiet revolution. The firm introduced a three-hulled sailing vessel, the *Misty Law*, for live-aboard diving adventures. In 1980, Duncan and Annie Muirhead and Hal McCarney designed and built the *Lammer Law*, which was the world's largest trimaran at the time. In 1988, Trimarine leapfrogged their own record with the 105-foot *Cuan Law*. To this day, *Cuan Law* remains the world standard for trimaran sailing vessels in size, comfort and luxury.

Most of the year, *Cuan Law* quietly plies the crystal-blue waters of the British Virgin Islands to the delight of divers, snorkelers and sailing aficionados. It's apparent that guests appreciate the silent splendor of traveling by wind power: members of Trimarine's "Ten Ton Club" have made more than 10 trips on the boat.

Anthony's Key Resort

A Bay Islands' Paradise for Divers

Twenty-six years ago, Honduras was the scene of a revolution. In 1971, diving pioneers accepted a challenge: to introduce recreational diving to the Bay islands. They organized the first scuba program for the resort known today as Anthony's Key. Thus were born the concepts of the dive resort and dive travel. Since 1971, the owners of Anthony's Key, the Galindo family, have guided the resort through a steady series of changes and improvements. This year was no exception.

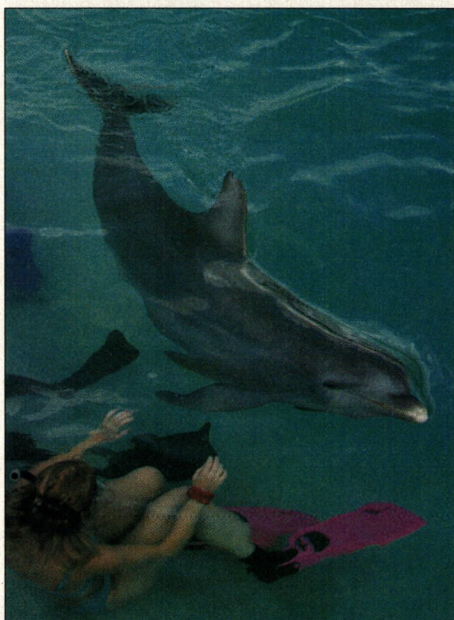
Anthony's Key Resort (AKR) is now a PADI Five-Star Instructor Development Center, the only such facility in Honduras. The school features spacious, air-conditioned classrooms with state-of-the-art audiovisual equipment and a hyperbaric chamber. Anthony's Key is a Garden of Eden complete with a lively dive operation. The tropical climate is pleasant year-round. Phone AKR for instructor course dates in 1997 and 1998. Or contact the resort to discuss putting together a group for a custom IDC.

AKR offers attractive all-inclusive packages that feature the Instructor Development Course, Instructor Evaluation, meals and lodging—and a vacation in tropical paradise to boot!

The resort recently added a Pro-48 Custom jet-drive boat to its large fleet. The boat speeds divers on two- and three-tank safaris to dive sites that are beyond the range of conventional boats: pristine walls, pinnacles and seamounts, even the Cayos Cochinos.

Anthony's Key hosts the Institute for Marine Sciences (IMS), a research organization chartered by the government of Honduras. IMS witnessed a

baby boom in 1996—four dolphins were born between August and September. One dolphin, Copan, evidently had a busy year: he fathered all four youngsters.



PHOTOGRAPHY: BOB CURRAN

At AKR, one of the most exciting activities is interacting with dolphins in their natural habitat. Under the guidance of the IMS staff, you can swim, play and snorkel with these magnificent animals. Certified scuba divers can interact with dolphins in open water. Kids eight to 14 appreciate Dolphin Discovery

Camp, week-long programs held throughout June, July and August (cost \$500). Under the heading of "why should the kids have all the fun of camp," Anthony's Key will introduce several Dolphin Discovery Seminars for adults in late 1997. Guests can fit these seminars neatly into a vacation.

Cindy Garoutte, author of the leading dive guide to the Bay Islands, recently joined Photo Roatan as chief instructor and photo-video pro. The photo center now offers one of the broadest line-ups of services and courses in the Caribbean. Several months ago, the staff at Photo Roatan completed two videos in cooperation with the Institute for Marine Sciences: "Dolphin Discovery" and "Bay Islands Marine Life Identification." To purchase a tape, contact AKR.

Anthony's Key is *the* expression of tropical nature on the verdant island of Roatan. Your island home is a cozy bungalow nestled in greenery or perched at the edge of the blue lagoon. Seven-night all-inclusive packages range from \$750 to \$975 pp/do. They include accommodations, three boat dives a day, two night boat dives, shore diving, all meals (RSD readers rate AKR food in the top 25 in the diving world), fiestas,

picnic on the beach, horseback riding, use of kayaks, canoes and sailboards, dolphin presentations, buoyancy control workshop, and more (too much to list here).

BOOK IT ▶ Phone Bahia Tours at (800) 227-DIVE or (305) 666-1997. Internet: <http://www.aventuras.com>.

Caribbean Explorer

World Class Diving and Exceptional Value



In the world of live-aboard dive boats, the M/V *Caribbean Explorer* is no stranger to the winner's circle. NAUI named the vessel the first Floating Dream Resort. The Scuba World television series declared the boat Live-Aboard Of The Year in 1988. And in the three *RSD* Readers' Choice surveys since 1995, divers have consistently ranked the *Caribbean Explorer* among the top six live-aboards in the world.

Owner/operator Clay McCardell freely admits that there are live-aboards in more exotic, far-flung locations, and live-aboards with more luxurious accommodations, jacuzzis, and fine china (and prices to match). So what's behind the boat's success? Year after year, the *Caribbean Explorer's* stock in trade has remained top-notch diving off Saba and St. Kitts. Comfortable accommodations. Excellent cuisine and omnipresent snacks. Professional and personable service from a crew that makes you feel like a friend. Delivering exceptional value for hard-earned vacation dollars.

"WAKE-UP-AND-JUMP-OVER-BOARD" DIVING

The *Caribbean Explorer* serves up six days of superb diving adventure: two days in St. Kitts, and four days in the Saba Marine Park. The diving is at a variety of sites and depths—shoals, walls, offshore pinnacles, overhanging reefs and tunnels. Marine life is varied and abundant. Dive sites are pristine. Guests can dive as many as 5 times a day.

THE VESSEL

Since 1987, Clay McCardell has renovated and upgraded the *Caribbean Explorer* five times in a relentless pursuit of excellence. Clay has a perfectionist's eye for service and details that spell the difference between a good live-aboard experience and a great one.



The *Caribbean Explorer* accommodates 16 passengers comfortably in eight air-conditioned double cabins, each with private sink and vanity. The dive deck is equipped with bathroom, individual gear lockers and tank racks, photo lab for daily E-6 processing, camera tables, battery recharging stations, freshwater rinse baths, two freshwater showers and a rack for drying wetsuits. The crew provides air fills at each diver's station—you can leave your BC on your tank for the entire cruise.

The enclosed salon on the main level accommodates the galley, dining tables, TV, VCR, 100-volume video library and retail center for batteries, film and save-a-dive items. The spacious upper deck features an additional entertainment area: an open-air salon with comfortable seating, TV, VCR, stereo, barbecue and wet bar. Flop into the lounge chairs to bask in the Caribbean sun.

THE DETAILS MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

During cruises, the crew captures underwater and topside memories for you on video. For divers who'd like to upgrade skills, there's a selection of NAUI and PADI advanced and specialty courses. If you'd like to explore Saba and St. Kitts topside, options include kayaking, beachcombing, rain forest tours and hikes, horseback riding, even golf—all without affecting the diving schedule of other passengers.

BOOK IT ► An eight-day cruise on the *Caribbean Explorer* costs \$1,195. For information, lowest-cost airline connections and reservations, phone Explorer Ventures Ltd, (800) 322-3577 or (307) 235-0683. WWW: <http://www.caribexplorer.com>. E-mail: Sarah@caribexplorer.com. Or contact your dive travel specialist or travel agent.

Divers Institute of Technology

For a Successful Career in Commercial Diving



Since 1968, Divers Institute of Technology of Seattle has prepared thousands of students for successful careers. The DIT course of instruction is built on two principles: safe, broad, comprehensive training in all phases of commercial diving, and thorough preparation for gainful

employment and advancement in the industry.

A year ago, DIT launched a state-of-the-art dive boat. The *Response*—a 65-foot vessel with catamaran hull and recompression chamber—is a floating classroom for deep-air and heliox diving. DIT facilities include 32,400 square feet of docks and facilities, moorings for floating craft and submerged diving projects, plus over 7,500 square feet of classrooms and offices.

Training is supervised by the staff of seven instructors who bring a century of collective Navy and commercial diving experience to the Institute. The complete, all-inclusive program runs 30 weeks. Students make all dives in open-water working conditions—not in training tanks—and

make actual open-water deep dives, an advantage for graduates that's unique to DIT. Throughout the year, a new class begins training the first Monday of each month. Class size averages 14 students.

DIT maintains a network of off-shore and in-shore diving contractors. Listings for employment opportunities far exceed the number of graduates.

The student services office offers assistance in obtaining housing and part-time employment. Federal financial aid is available to those who qualify. Approved for veterans training.

FOR COMPLETE INFO ► Contact Divers Institute of Technology: (800) 634-8377 or (206) 783-5542. E-mail: dit@wolfenet.com. Web: <http://www.diveweb.com/dit>.

GRAND CAYMAN

Red Sail Sports

"Fall" Into Savings on Grand Cayman

Grand Cayman may be the best-known dive destination in the Caribbean, if not the world. Year 'round, the water is warm and crystal-clear. There are stretches of magnificent, unspoiled coral reefs, schools of colorful and friendly fish, spectacular shipwrecks, vertical walls and dramatic drop-offs. Starting this fall, divers will have the chance to experience the best of Grand Cayman with some special savings.

Red Sail Sports' "I Did It All" packages start at \$435 for four-day/three-night stays from Sept. 1 to Dec. 15, 1997. This is a chance to pocket up to \$31 on regular diving rates and up to \$65 per night on Grand Cayman's most luxurious resorts: the Hyatt Regency, the Westin Casuarina and Villas of the

Galleon condominiums. The specials include an "I Did It All" T-shirt, daily two-tank trips, an afternoon or night boat dive and unlimited shore diving. To sweeten the deal, American Airlines is offering special Miami-to-Cayman round trips starting at \$178.

BRING YOUR PASSPORT TO WIN BIG

With "I Did It All" packages, divers receive a "passport" with pages for discounts on meals, dining, water sports activities and car rentals. Make a purchase at a participating establishment, and the manager stamps your passport. The diver who collects the most stamps wins a free return trip that includes air from



American Airlines, accommodations at the Hyatt Regency and Westin Casuarina Resorts, diving, meals and vacation activities.

BOOK IT ► To customize your "I Did It All" vacation, phone Liberty Travel/GoGo Tours toll-free at (888) 885-4237. For Red Sail Sports, phone (800) 255-6425. Internet: www.redsail.com. E-mail: info@redsail.com

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the Outstanding
Los Roques Archipelago!



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- A world-class Caribbean destination
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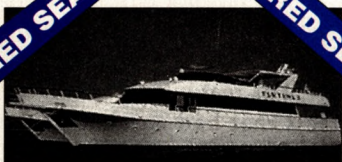
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TURKS & CAICOS

(Continued from page 54)

pasta. **DOWN TO EARTH:** José's has that Mexican-restaurant franchise feel (the salsa is excellent), the Banana Boat puts out some good island food, and the Tiki Hut offers chicken and ribs in a—you guessed it—tiki hut atmosphere.

Nightlife

If you're looking to shake your groove thing, pencil a Thursday into your itinerary so you can visit the Shark Bite at Turtle Cove. This is Provo's version of Grand Cayman's popular Lone Star, replete with swinging divemasters, well-dressed natives and beer-drenched Club Med's. The Tiki Hut is a favorite after-hours haunt among divemasters, with happy hour from 5 to 7 p.m. Looking for laid-back action? Stay home—chances are your hotel has a good bar.

Turks Islands

After visiting Provo, you'd never guess that Grand Turk is the islands' capital. It doesn't boast high-rise condos, glitzy resorts or swanky restaurants. It does, however, promise some of the best wall diving anywhere.

One look at our 1997 Reader Ratings and you'll believe it: Grand Turk and the 22 moored sites on its wall took first place in the Caribbean for fish life, second for quality of walls, third for overall destination in the Caribbean/Atlantic region—overshadowing such big-hitters as Little Cayman, Cozumel and Roatan—and fourth for the health of its marine environment.

The Diving

As far as dive operations go, your choices are fewer and farther between than on Provo, but no worse. The three dive shops can easily accommodate the 2,000 divers who visit here each year. You can stay on Salt Cay or make it a day trip from Grand Turk. A round-trip ticket on Interisland is \$30, and you can tell the pilot to fly low on the return flight if you've been diving.

Two-square-mile Salt Cay, with a population pushing 100, lies due south of Grand Turk. Here, the wall starts at 35 to 50 feet, and slopes more gradually than those on Grand Turk. The deepest dive is 140 feet at Black Coral Canyon.

Sometimes, when seas are flat, Grand Turk operators will make the 22-

mile voyage to South Caicos, but the opening of a dive resort there has eliminated that need.

Marine Environment

The entire west coast of Grand Turk was protected by marine park status in 1991, with the usual rules: no fishing, by hand, line or spear, and no anchoring. Four inches of rainfall a year means two things: water conservation and great visibility. There are a total of 22 moored sites within park boundaries.

The eastern or "creek" side of Salt Cay is protected by marine park status. Salt Cay Divers is petitioning the government to make the west side a marine park as well. There are a 10 moored sites on the island's more frequently dived west side.

Accommodations

Like dive operators, your choices of accommodations are fewer here than on Provo. There are only a handful of hotels popular with American divers. The Salt Raker Inn, Turks Head Inn and the Sitting Pretty seem to be most popular; others include the Arawak Inn and Beach Club, Beachcomber Guest House, Coral Reef Beach Club and Guanahani Beach. On Salt Cay, the famous Mount Pleasant Guest House, Castaways Beach House, Halfway Guest House and Windmills Plantation are your only choices.

Restaurants

The main hotels have their own kitchens. Many people—locals included—opt for the casual Water's Edge Restaurant, across the street from Oasis Divers. Try the Cajun grouper fingers and daily seafood specials. Owners Jan and David mix a mean drink, and they even rent scooters.

Diversions

Turks & Caicos National Museum is one of the finest small museums in the Caribbean—don't miss it. Stroll through the quaint, pastel-washed streets of Cockburn Town, the capital. Snooze in a hammock, or take a scooter ride to the northern tip to see a cast-iron lighthouse, shipped piecemeal from England and assembled here in 1852.

Nightlife

After the green flash at sunset, the biggest deal may be grabbing a bite to eat and racking out. After dinner, you have one option, The Water's Edge (see Restaurant section above).

Nick Lucey is an RSD associate editor.

The Ultimate Buoyancy Check

Are you diving with too much lead? Too little? Never guesstimate again: Use this test to fine-tune your buoyancy for perfect neutrality.

STEP 1

Estimate the Weight You'll Need.

Based upon the equipment you're wearing and your body weight, put on enough lead so that you float at eye level while holding a full breath with no air in your BC and without using your arms

or fins. An exhale should cause you to sink.

Exposure protection is the primary variable here. Divers with very little wetsuit protection will require less weight and undergo fewer buoyancy changes during the dive than those wearing a full wetsuit or a dry suit.

Another variable is the

tank you're using and the weight of the air inside it. As they're emptied, most tanks will add between five and eight pounds of buoyancy. You must start out neutrally buoyant with full lungs or slightly negatively buoyant or you'll be unable to make a safety stop at the end of a dive without popping to the surface.

STEP 2

Monitor Your Buoyancy.

During your dive, note whether you were overweighted or underweighted. Did you have to kick to stay down at depth? Or did you have to inflate your BC more than halfway to keep from sinking?

Because of the change in tank buoyancy, it is better to be slightly overweighted at the beginning of the dive and use your BC to maintain buoyancy. Remember to vent air from your BC as your tank pressure drops and the cylinder becomes more buoyant.

STEP 3

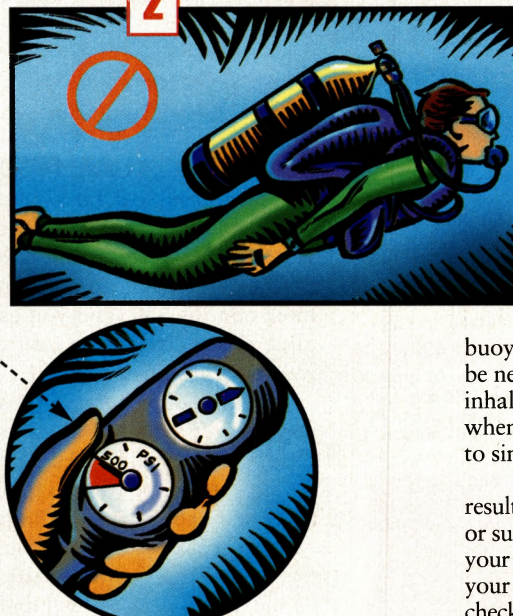
Perform the Ultimate Buoyancy Check.

Because of the importance of slow, controlled ascents and safety stops, you must be able to maintain neutral buoyancy at the end of a dive, when your tank pressure is low and you're approaching the surface to perform a safety stop.

That's why the best time to check your buoyancy is at the end of a dive: Once you've breathed the tank down to 500 psi, ascend to between 10 and 15 feet and vent all remaining air from your BC. If your

buoyancy is correct, you'll be neutral, so when you inhale you tend to rise and when you exhale you tend to sink.

Depending upon the results of this test, either add or subtract weight before your next dive. At the end of your next dive, double-check your buoyancy.



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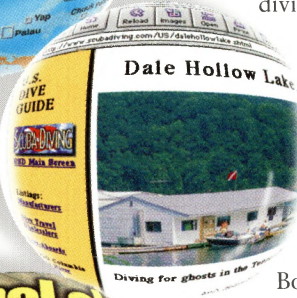
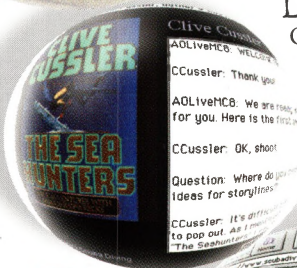
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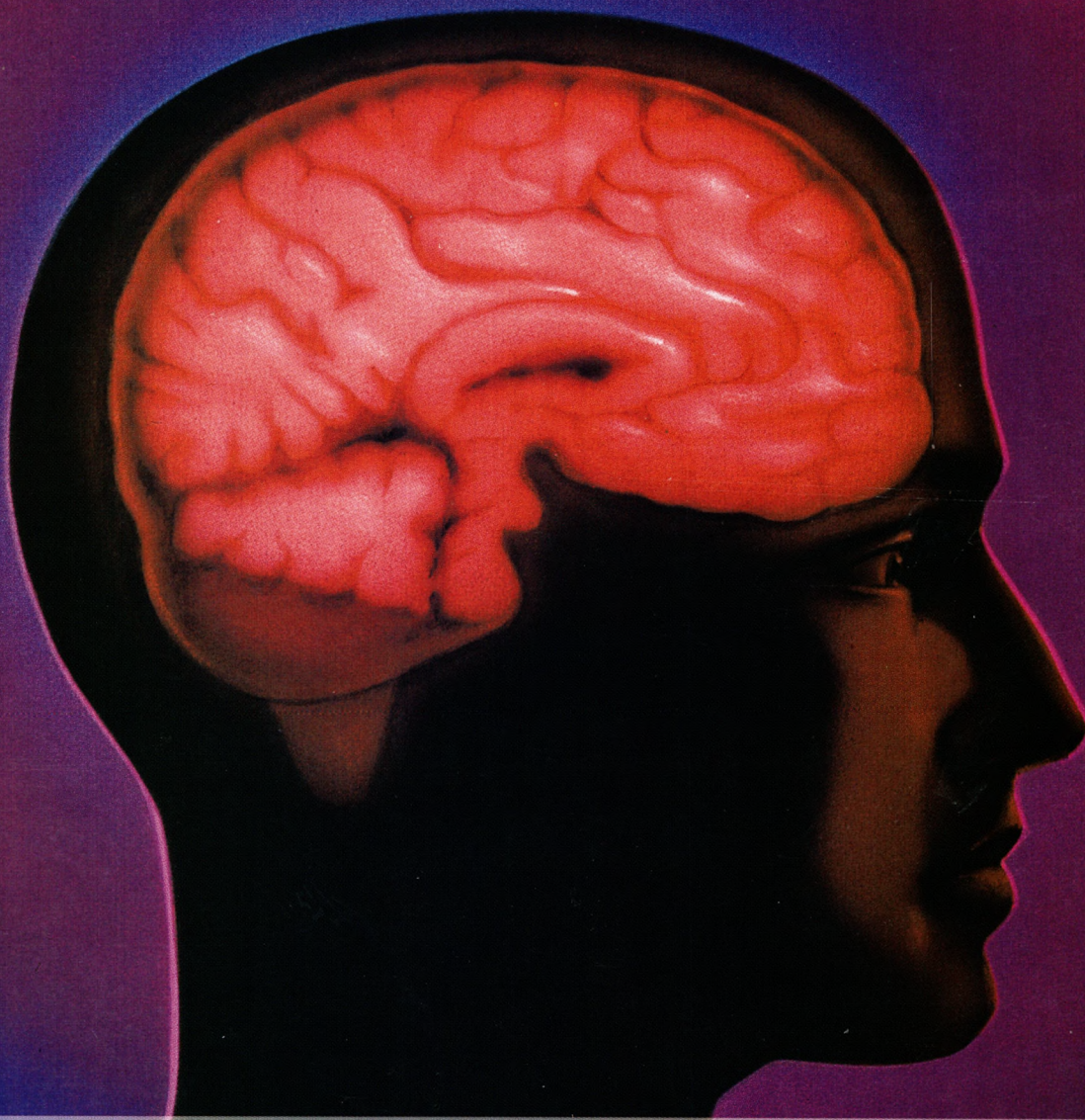
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